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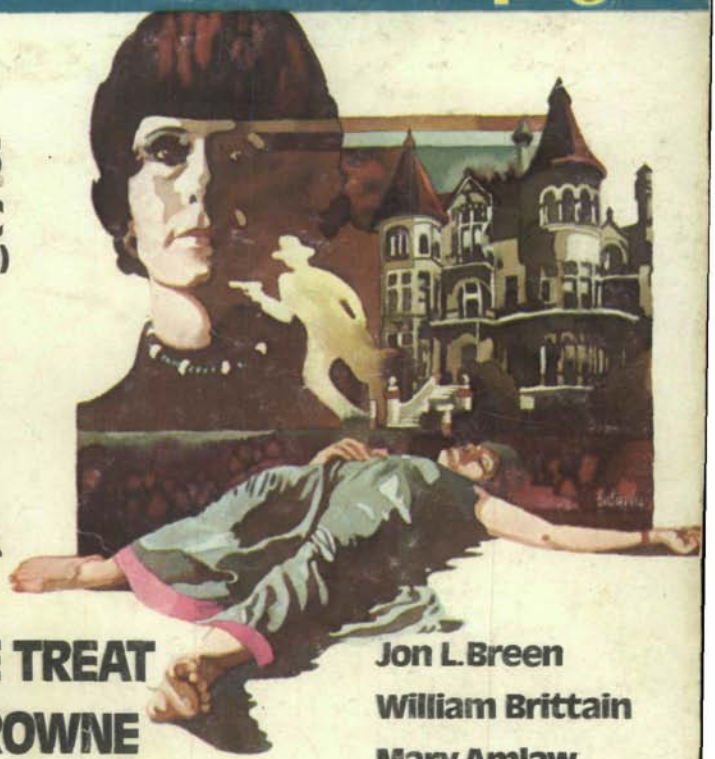

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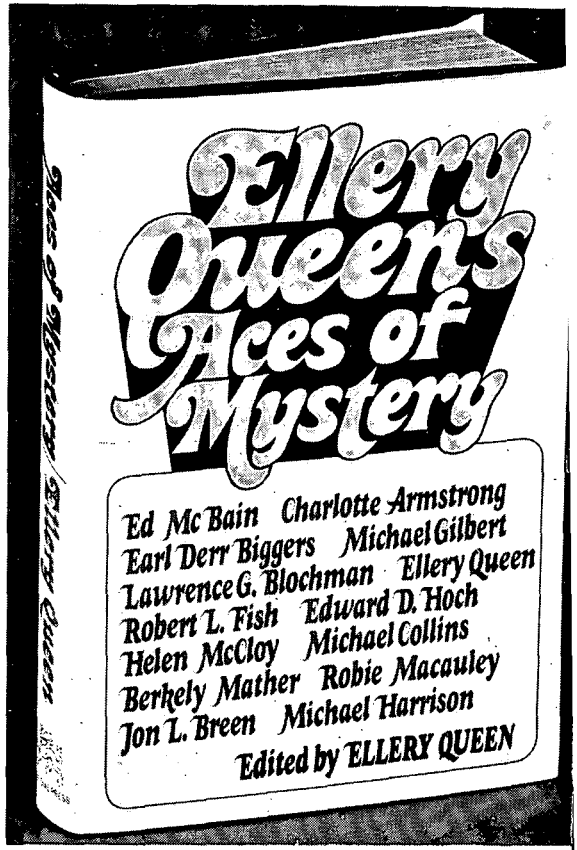
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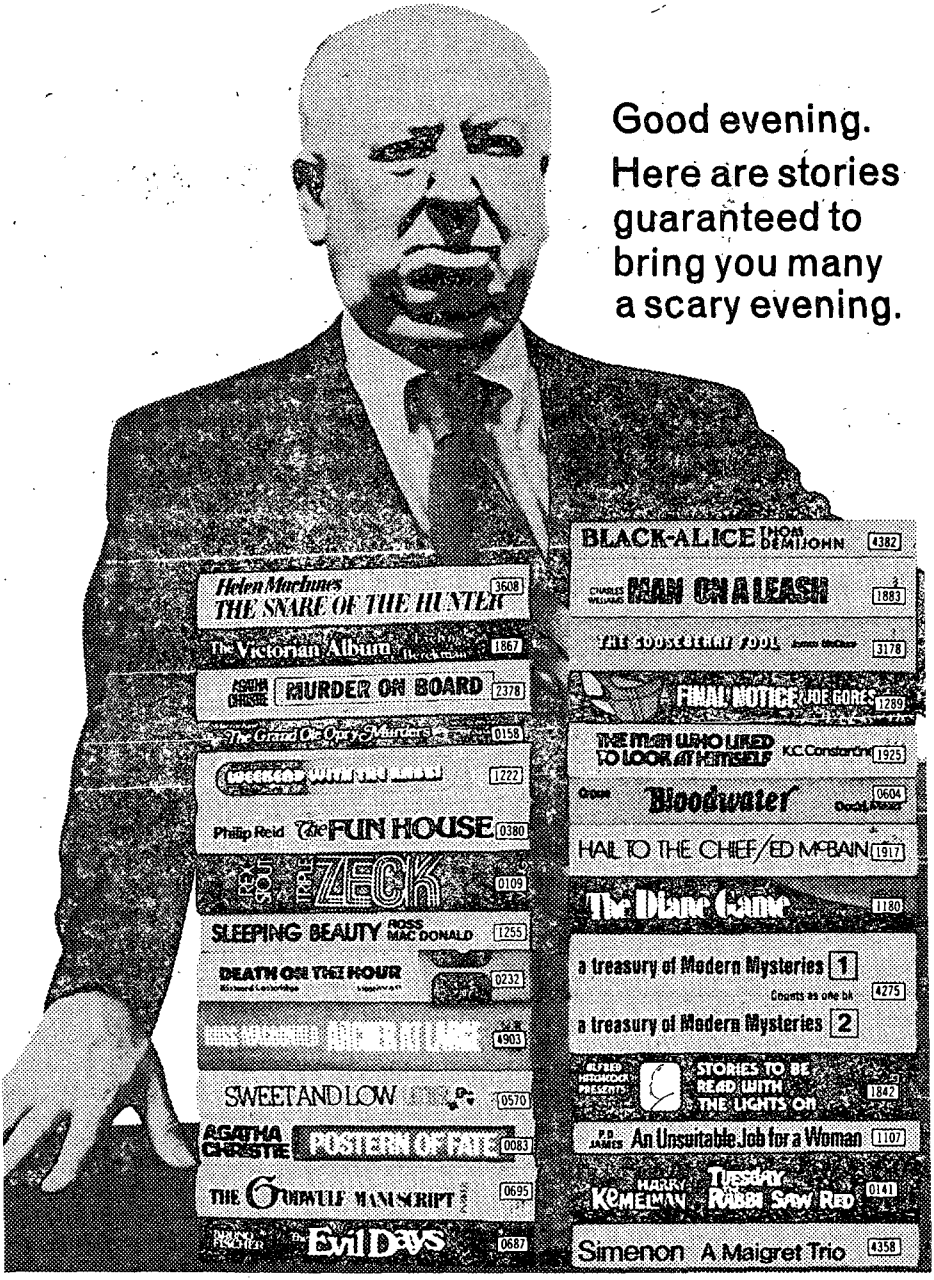
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a *NEW* Raffles story by

BARRY PEROWNE

In which Mr. A. J. Raffles, the Amateur Cracksman-Cricketer, and his "Watson," Bunny Manders, match wits with Dr. A. Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, and his "Bunny," Mr. James Watson . . .

Normally this story would be published in a February issue, to synchronize with Sherlock Holmes month—the month of the annual dinners of the Baker Street Irregulars and the Scion Societies. But this piece of Doyleana-Sherlockiana is so exceptional that we decided to include it in our 34th Anniversary Issue, and we predict that this classic pastiche will be reprinted for many years to come, perhaps forever, and thus never be forgotten . . .

RAFFLES:
The Enigma of the Admiral's Hat

by BARRY PEROWNE

"Moral or otherwise, Bunny," said Raffles, "it's a fact of life that possession is nine points of the law."

Immaculate in a grey suit, a pearl in his cravat, his dark hair crisp, his keen face tanned, he tossed aside the London *Times*, in which a correspondence had been going on for months about some ancient bas-reliefs, the Thracian Marbles, unearthed by an archaeologist on a field expedition and presented by him to the British Museum.

"This savant," Raffles added, offering me a Sullivan from his cigarette-case, "probably hopes to be rewarded with a knighthood by the Queen—talking of whom, Bunny, this royal occasion we're on our way to should be a pretty good week, with luck."

The train in which we were speeding through the sun-basking countryside was bound

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for the naval town of Portsmouth, which Her Majesty, making one of her now rare public appearances, was visiting for the purposes of declaring Navy Week open.

Among the official functions and sporting events arranged for the week was a three-day cricket match between the Royal Navy and a Gentlemen-of-England team captained by A. J. Raffles.

At Portsmouth Town station we found our host, the skipper of the Navy team, Lieutenant-Commander Braithwaite, in dazzling white naval uniform, waiting to greet us off the train.

"You're the first of the Gentlemen blokes to arrive, Raffles," he said, as we followed a porter carrying our valises and Raffles' cricket-bag to the open four-wheeler Braithwaite had waiting. "The Navy Week opening ceremony went off very well this morning. I've just come from it. The Queen seemed quite her regal self, though still in widow's weeds. You'll get a chance to see her after lunch. She's due to board the royal yacht at two o'clock, at Portsmouth Hard, and proceed to her summer residence, Osborne House, in the Isle-of-Wight, just across the water. To see her pass by, I'd hoped to get you on board H.M.S. *Victory*—"

"Horatio Nelson's old flagship," I said, "at the Battle of Trafalgar?"

"Yes, indeed," said Braithwaite, as our cab jingled through streets ablaze with flags and pictures of the Queen. "*Victory* lies, perfectly preserved, at a permanent anchorage in our harbour here, but only invited bigwigs are allowed on board her to-day —including a bunch of millionaires."

"Millionaires?" said Raffles.

"The international social crowd," explained Braithwaite. "Commodore Vanderbilt, the Duke of Westminster, one of the Rothschilds, the Prince of Monaco, Mr. Leonard Jerome of New York with his beautiful daughter Jennie and her husband Lord Randolph Churchill. Real swells! They've come over in parties for the day from their glittering private steam-yachts gathered at Cowes, in the Isle-of-Wight, for the Regatta."

I met Raffles' grey eyes. Cowes Regatta! He gave me a rueful look. We had clean forgotten the most brilliant event of the summer social season. At Cowes we might have found some financial way to improve the shining hour. Instead, he had tied himself up in a three-day cricket match on just the wrong side of the water.

"So near, Bunny," he mur-

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mured to me, "and yet so far!"

"By courtesy," our host Braithwaite was saying, "of the Royal Navy Museum at Greenwich, Portsmouth's been loaned, in honour of the Queen's visit, a national treasure—the uniform, the hat and bloodstained knee-breeches, waistcoat and swallowtail blue coat with epaulettes, which Nelson was wearing when he fell mortally wounded on *Victory*'s quarter-deck in the very hour of his decisive triumph at Trafalgar. From to-morrow *Victory* will be open for the public to view Nelson's uniform, but only invited bigwigs are on board her to-day. Still, I can get you on board a Navy tug, *Gosport Jezebel*, to see the Queen pass by presently in the royal yacht."

After lunch at the fine old waterfront inn, The Lord Nelson, where our Navy hosts had billeted the Gentlemen cricket team with myself as supernumerary, we boarded a tug flying the white ensign. As *Jezebel* steamed out from her berth, the great harbour, backed by the Portsdown Hill forts built to repel the Grand Army of Napoleon, was crowded with craft of every description, all laden with sightseers.

Besides Raffles and myself, there were a few other favoured civilians on board *Jezebel* and, as I leaned with Raffles and Braithwaite against the tug's throbbing rail, taking in the spectacular scene in the blazing sunshine, there drifted my way a cloud of strong shag-tobacco smoke from the pipe of some man who had come up behind us.

"There she is, Watson," I heard a voice say, "the old *Victory*, as sound and trim as on the day Nelson sailed her, at the head of the fleet, into the blood and thunder of Trafalgar."

"A study in scarlet, that day," a second voice said. "Is Mr. Sherlock Holmes a patriotic man?"

"Unquestionably so. Look, Watson, there's a vacant space at the rail along there. Let's claim it."

Braithwaite, seeing me glance round at the two frock-coated, silk-hatted men as they strolled away along the deck, the taller man tossing pipe-smoke over his shoulder, told me who they were.

"The shorter chap," he said, "is a Mr. James Watson, Secretary of the Portsmouth and Southsea Literary and Scientific Society. The big, burly man is Dr. A. Conan Doyle, in medical practice in Southsea, the residential part of Portsmouth. As to Mr. Sherlock Holmes"—Braithwaite chuck-

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led—"I'll lend you something to-night that'll introduce you to him, if you haven't yet met. I say, though! By Jove, look at those nobs on the old *Victory*!"

Our tug had hove-to as near as was permitted to Nelson's flagship, around which circling whaleboats manned by Navy oarsmen with capbands marked H.M.S. *Victory* preserved a space of water clear of the clustering sightseeing craft.

The bowsprit chains of the old seventy-four-gun ship-of-the-lines shone like silver. Her masts and yards towered above us to the blue sky. Her oaken hull was freshly tarred. Through her open gunports, framed in fresh white paint, the guns of her broadsides looked ready to rumble out with a lion's roar at the drop of a hat.

On her decks, her distinguished visitors stood about in groups, conversing. Others were gathered in the old ship's carven stern-gallery. Beautiful women twirled their parasols languidly. Jewels sparkled. Tophats and gold watch-chains glistened.

"Millionaires all," Raffles murmured to me. "So near—and yet so far!"

Braithwaite explained to us that some of the unfamiliar naval uniforms visible on board *Victory* were those of Captains from American, Greek, German, Italian, and other foreign warships which, on courtesy visits for Navy Week at Portsmouth, were lying at anchor off the Isle-of-Wight.

The report of a cannon clapped across the harbour.

"First minute-gun of the royal salute," said Braithwaite. "The *Victoria-and-Albert* is putting out from Portsmouth Hard."

The guns of the saluting battery at Haslar Point continued to fire at one-minute intervals through the storm of cheering as the Queen's yacht, flying the scarlet-and-gold of the Royal Standard, steamed through the multitude of small craft that made way for her stately progress.

Up the rigging of *Victory*, as the royal yacht approached, raced barefoot sailors in the uniforms of Nelson's time, the two topmost men running out to either tip of the mainmast-yard, to stand rigid, away up there, as the whole team formed a gigantic V—alike for *Victory* and for the royal widow whose tiny figure, in black shawl and jet-beaded bonnet, stood in regal solitude, well apart from her clustered attendants, on the deck of her yacht steaming slowly by.

As the Queen passed and, to the continued firing of the

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minute-guns, the royal yacht began to recede toward the harbour-mouth, I heard a wild cry, and I was just in time to see the sailor standing at the larboard tip of *Victory*'s mainmast-yard sway on his dizzy perch—and fall, turning helplessly in the air, to strike the water with a glittering splash.

I hardly heard the continued cheering, further off, or the measured reports of the saluting battery's guns, as our *Jezebel* tug's bridge-telegraph bell clanged, the tug throbbed to life, and, with a dozen other assorted craft, sightseers and Navy whaleboats, surged to the rescue.

One of the Navy whaleboats beat us to it. As our tug's screws reversed, slowing us alongside, I saw sailors in the whaleboat heaving in the drenched man, unconscious or dead, over their gunwale. They stretched him on the floorboards and, at a barked order from their midshipman coxswain, bent to their oars, pulled around under the chains of *Victory*'s great bowsprit, and, leaving a dozen flung lifebelts and a confusion of would-be rescue craft bobbing on the water, passed from my view.

It was smartly done. Even before the last report of the saluting cannons marked the passing of the Queen's yacht out of the harbour-mouth, the incident was over.

Yet, if rumour was to be believed, something else had happened on board H.M.S. *Victory*. From what source the rumour emanated I had no idea, but by the time we disembarked from the tug *Jezebel* at Portsmouth Hard the excited crowd there was abuzz with a story that a Marine sentry on solitary duty in *Victory*'s wardroom, where Nelson's uniform was displayed, had been found chloroformed shortly after the Queen had passed, and that, with the exception of the hat, Horatio Nelson's uniform, stained at Trafalgar with his lifeblood, had disappeared.

"Impossible!" said Braithwaite, as he, Raffles, and I jostled our way through the crowd besieging some waiting cabs. "Nelson's uniform stolen? It just *can't* be true!"

A whiff of shag-tobacco smoke from the pipe of Dr. Conan Doyle, who, with Mr. Watson, was just ahead of us, making for the cabs, floated back to me.

"*Can* it be true?" I heard Mr. Watson ask.

"The mention of the hat, Watson, has a circumstantial ring. Yes, I fear this rumour *could* have some factual basis."

"In which case, Doctor, does

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any point occur to you to which our friend Holmes would be likely to devote particular attention?"

"The hat, Watson—the enigma of the Admiral's hat."

"But people are saying the hat was *not* taken!"

"That is the enigma, Watson."

People jostled between us at that moment, and I lost sight of the two men.

Raffles and I dined, that night, at the Royal Naval Barracks. The rest of the Gentlemen-of-England cricket team had arrived during the day and all of us were dinner guests of the Navy team in a vast room with walls from which gilt-framed portraits of bygone admirals, of Mr. Samuel Pepys, sometime Secretary of the Navy, and of Horatio Nelson himself, wearing what was in all probability the very uniform which now had been stolen from his old flagship, gazed down on us.

At dinner, the talk was of nothing but the crime committed on the *Victory*, which was indeed a fact. The sailor who had fallen from the yardarm was a naval rating called John S. Hayter. His fall was said to have been due to sunstroke; he was now in Haslar Naval Hospital with a dislocated shoulder. The Marine sentry had, apparently, been chloroformed from behind and could say only that his assailant had been a man of great strength.

"What about the distinguished guests, Braithwaite?" Raffles asked.

"They had to be regarded, of course, as above suspicion. They've all dispersed now."

"The millionaires gone back to their steam-yachts at Cowes, have they?" said Raffles "H'm! Has the Navy called in the County Constabulary?"

"Of course. Police reinforcements are pouring in from all over."

"Including the Isle-of-Wight?"

"Naturally. Except for the Queen's bobbies, guarding her at Osborne House, there'll be damned few police left, over in the island."

"Steward," said Raffles, "I'll have a drop more of that wine."

As we were leaving the Barracks, Braithwaite handed Raffles an obviously much read copy of *Beeton's Christmas Annual.*

"The thing I told you I'd lend you," said Braithwaite. "It's a shilling shocker, published quite recently. Dr. Conan Doyle wrote the main story. It's called *A Study in Scarlet.* I don't think he gets many patients."

"Or he wouldn't have time to write shockers," said Raffles,

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putting the magazine under his red-lined evening cape. "I'll skim through this to-night, and see you in the morning, Braithwaite, ten-thirty on the cricket ground."

Out of curiosity, I borrowed *A Study in Scarlet* from Raffles next morning. He told me he had skimmed through it in bed. At the cricket ground I found myself a chair on the pavilion terrace in the sunshine and sat reading the story while the cricket went on.

The Mr. Sherlock Holmes I had heard mentioned turned out to be the leading character in the book. A private investigator of crime, who claimed to have methods of his own, he held my interest. Even when Raffles went in to bat, I read on with increasing absorption, until a sudden collective groan from the spectators, mostly in Navy white, made me look up.

Out at the wicket, on the green expanse of flawless turf, Raffles had thrown down his bat and was pulling off his right-hand batting-glove. Blood dripped from his fingers.

"Bad luck, Raffles," I heard Braithwaite call, as Raffles wrapped his handkerchief round his hand. "Will it put you out of the match?"

"I'm afraid so, Braithwaite," Raffles said. He came to the pavilion. "Kicking ball, Bunny," he told me. "Split my forefinger open. It'll need a stitch or two, by the look of it. I'll get changed and join you."

I had an uneasy suspicion about the mishap and, when he rejoined me, I accused him of contriving the damage.

"Not entirely, Bunny," he said, as we left the ground. "I intended to get out of the match, but that ball came at me very fast and I mistimed it more than I'd planned. No matter, I'm out of the game. It's only a friendly one, and you and I have fish to fry at Cowes Regatta—goldfish!"

He hailed a passing hansom and, as the horse jingled to a standstill, asked the cabbie, "D'you know the address of a Dr. Doyle?"

"Yes, sir, Number One, Bush Villas, Elm Grove, Southsea."

"No, Raffles," I said. "Not *that* doctor!"

"Why not?" said Raffles, surprised.

"I can't say exactly. This story of his—I just feel, somehow—"

"Nonsense! Nothing wrong with the story. It's an interesting little tale. Besides, Braithwaite said this Dr. Doyle doesn't get too many patients, so he'll probably be glad of a fee. Come—hop in, Bunny!"

Bush Villas, in residential, tree-shaded Elm Grove, proved

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to be four attached houses, tall and dignified, with lace-curtained windows and bathbricked front steps. Raffles gave the bellpull of Number One a tug with his undamaged hand. The polished brass nameplate on the door had a newish look, as though the doctor had not been long in practice; and in fact, when he himself opened the door to us, he looked to be —though tall and dignified, with a bushy brown moustache —no more than thirty, half-a-dozen or so years Raffles' senior.

Powerfully built, frockcoated, a silver watch-chain looped across his white waistcoat, the doctor seemed to take us in at a single glance of his keen, direct blue eyes.

"Ah," he said, "one of the Gentlemen cricketers had a knock on the hand, eh? Come in."

"That was a quick diagnosis," said Raffles, as we entered.

"Navy versus Gentlemen is the Match of the Week," said Dr. Doyle, leading us into a small surgery. "You're not in uniform, so you're not Navy. You're wearing a Zingari Club cravat, so you *are* a cricketer."

"Hence," said Raffles, with a laugh, "one of the Gents? I see. Doctor, my name's Raffles. This is my friend Manders."

"Well, let's have a look at that hand, Mr. Raffles."

"A study in scarlet," said Raffles, unwinding the gory handkerchief.

"From that remark," said Dr. Doyle, "I deduce you're one of the dozens who've read my little shocker. H'm! Who did this to your finger—the Navy's fast bowler? That fellow always leaves a trail of walking wounded. Incidentally"— he went to work on Raffles' finger—"didn't I see you two on the tug *Jezebel* yesterday?"

"We were there," said Raffles. "What would your Mr. Sherlock Holmes make of this theft from H.M.S. *Victory*?"

"He'd be interested, I fancy, in the minute-guns."

"The guns?" said Raffles.

"Everything indicates that the crime was the carefully planned, co-ordinated work of a number of men. They can have arranged to time their respective actions by noting the cannon reports of the royal salute."

"What a novel use of the royal salute!" Raffles exclaimed.

"The crime presents several features which would have interested Holmes." The doctor bandaged Raffles' finger, then slid a kid-leather black finger-stall over it. "There you are, Mr. Raffles."

"Thank you, Dr. Doyle. What fee do I owe you?"

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"You won't be able to play," said the doctor, "but I take it you'll be at the cricket ground? Very well, We'll see about a fee when I take the stitches out of that finger. Drop in here towards the end of the week."

The door of No. 1 Bush Villas, with the name *Dr. A. Conan Doyle* on its polished brassplate, closed on us.

Late that afternoon found us, not at the cricket ground, but over in the nearby Isle-of-Wight, observing the millionaires' steam-yachts anchored off Cowes—among them, Commodore Vanderbilt's; the Duke of Westminster's, with Mr. Leonard Jerome and Lord and Lady Randolph Churchill in his party; the S/Y *Achilleion*, property of the Greek merchant-shipping magnate, Mr. Aristotle Andiakis; and the luxurious yacht flying the candy-striped burgee of the wealthy ocean-racer and ichthyologist, Prince Albert of Monaco.

"Fine, Bunny," said Raffles, as the puffing-billy train rattled us back through the buttercup meadows to Ryde, to board the paddle-steamer ferry across to Clarence Pier, Southsea. "To-morrow, as captain of the Gentleman team, I must put in an appearance at the cricket match for a few hours. While I'm there, you can pick up a few things we shall need, and in the evening we'll return, suitably attired, to Cowes, then make our move as opportunity offers. There's a small fortune in sparklers to be picked up in the ladies' cabins of any one of those yachts."

Next morning, while Raffles was at the cricket ground, I hunted Old Portsmouth for a sailors' second-hand slopshop, and found one in Landport Terrace, childhood home of Charles Dickens when his Mr. Micawberish father had been a civilian clerk employed by the Navy. I bought a couple of blue jerseys and well-worn peaked caps of the longshoreman type.

Just I was about to leave the shop, I saw Dr. Doyle and Mr. Watson. They were on the other side of the street, looking in at the window of a foreign-looking little restaurant—The Corfu Restaurant, according to the name on the window—where lobsters waved languid antennae among kegs of oysters and pickled vine-leaves on a bed of seaweed. The two men went in.

"You can get good shellfish across the street," said the slopshop man, seeing the direction of my gaze. "Belongs to a Mrs. Miranda Hayter, widder of a Royal Navy gunner-rating."

"It's far too early for lunch," I said, which was in fact so true that, as I slunk out of the slop-

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shop with my parcel, I wondered what Dr. Doyle and Mr. Watson were doing in the restaurant across the way.

Suddenly I remembered something. I hailed a cab, went to The Lord Nelson Inn, locked the parcel into the valise in my room there, then continued to the cricket ground. I found Raffles watching the cricket from a deckchair on the pavilion terrace. I told him I had just seen Dr. Doyle and Mr. Watson.

"The name of the woman who owns the restaurant they went into is Hayter," I said. "Raffles, the name of the sailor who fell from *Victory*'s yardarm is Able-Seaman John S. Hayter!"

"Splendid, Bunny!" said Raffles. "Dr. Doyle's obviously stumbled on to something to do with the *Victory* crime. He's following it up. The game's afoot for him. And the major part of the Hampshire Constabulary's fully preoccupied with the same crime. Nothing could suit us better! As opportunists, you and I've never had such a chance as this. Over in the Isle-of-Wight to-night, we'll be on an easy wicket, and you'll see —something will turn up for us."

"That," I said, thinking uneasily of the Dickens house in Landport Terrace, "is what Mr. Micawber used to say."

I still felt uneasy when, dressed as jerseyed longshoremen, we stepped off the little puffing-billy island train at Cowes Station that evening. The small town, all yacht-building yards, sail lofts, rope-walks, and ship's chandler stores, was *en fête* for the Regatta.

We sauntered around the harbour. The beautiful racing-yachts, their masts a forest of bare poles, lay moored against the harbour-wall. The millionaires' steam-yachts, lying out at anchor, were ablaze with lights. In evening dress, jewelled women and elegant men were dining under the deck-awnings. Music drifted to us from the instruments of the millionaires' private trios and quintets. Much further out, in the Channel, twinkled the lights of warships, British and visiting foreign ironclads lying at anchor.

Throngs of sailors, many of them on liberty from the foreign warships, were roistering in and out of the waterfront taverns.

"We haven't a chance, Raffles," I said. "There are too many people on those millionaires' steam-yachts."

He put a hand on my arm. "Bunny, there's a boat putting ashore from the *Achilleion*, and there's a carriage pulling up on the wharf along there and a

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crowd of sailors gathering round it. Let's see what's going on."

We walked along the cobbled wharf, added ourselves to the throng around the carriage, and saw at once why it had attracted interest. The tophatted driver and groom on the box wore the royal livery; on the doors of the carriage were the initials V.R. surmounted by a crown.

"The Queen sending a carriage to take somebody to Osborne House?" Raffles murmured. "Bunny, it's extremely unusual for Her Majesty to receive a visitor at her summer residence."

Alongside the seaweedy, water-lapped steps of the harbour wall, the S/Y *Achilleion*'s boat drew in. Oars were shipped and the boat held steady for a tall man of striking appearance to step out. His face leather-dark, aquiline, with a square-cut iron-grey beard and a monocle, he wore full evening-dress, the ribbon of some foreign Order of Chivalry slanting across his shirtfront, on his scarlet-lined cape a glittering jewelled star.

He was the Greek merchant-shipping millionaire, Mr. Aristotle Andiakis.

With the demeanour of a king, he came up the steps and, the groom holding the door open for him, mounted into the carriage. The groom climbed back up to the box, to sit stiffly there with folded arms, as the driver touched up the two magnificent black horses with his whip and the royal carriage clattered off along the wharf.

The boat's crew from S/Y *Achilleion* tied up their boat and, like the sailors who had gathered around, repaired to the nearest tavern.

"Bunny," Raffles said, "I told you something would turn up. Look at *Achilleion* out there. Very few lights on board. Mr. Andiakis evidently has no party of guests. The owner and half the crew are now ashore. The yacht will only be keeping an anchor watch. Now's our chance! Let's borrow a dinghy. There are dozens moored around the harbour-wall."

From a lampless section of the harbour we commandeered a dinghy. I took the oars and, with Raffles instructing me so as to avoid the lights reflected on the water from the other millionaires' steam-yachts, pulled out towards S/Y *Achilleion*. From the Greek yacht, as we neared it, I heard laughter —and a sudden sharp report.

"Champagne-cork," Raffles whispered to me. "There are a couple of men on the yacht's bridge. They're excited about something—seem to be drink-

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ing toasts. Pull on your right oar a bit. Now, both together —gently—to bring us under the yacht's counter."

As the jut of the counter loomed shadowy over us, Raffles was gone, rocking the dinghy as he leaped up, gripped the yacht's scupper-edge, and pulled himself soundlessly on board. Letting my oars trail in the rowlocks, I checked the dinghy against the yacht's stern. And here, in the deep shadow cast by the S/Y *Achilleion*'s counter, the sultry thumping of my heart measured out my vigil.

It seemed interminable. Reflected ribbons of light trembled on the harbour water. Music, laughter, voices reached me faintly from the other millionaires' steam-yachts. Sweat stung my eyes, salted my lips. My throat grew parched. What in God's name was Raffles doing? I strained my ears. No sound from *Achilleion*. I cursed Raffles. He had been gone too long. I cursed him again. I wished I never had met him. I consigned him to nethermost hell.

And there, suddenly, he was—not in hell, but a dark-jerseyed figure in a peaked cap, dangling by his hands in front of my eyes. I brought the dinghy under him. He dropped into it almost without sound.

"Shove off, Bunny," he whispered. "The quicker we're off this island, the better!"

I asked no questions. All seemed quiet on S/Y *Achilleion*, but I knew from Raffles' tone that something had gone wrong.

We tied up the dinghy where we had found it. In the distance, a train whistled officiously.

"Puffing Billy coming in from Ryde," said Raffles. "It'll start back in a few minutes, and we'll be on it!"

We were on the wooden platform of the station as the diminutive train approached, steaming and clattering, and I ventured to ask, "What happened?"

"Most of the cabins seemed unused, Bunny. But I found Mr. Andiakis' day cabin—furnished as a study, luxurious. There was a small safe in it—combination-lock—fairly simple. I got it open—" He broke off, gripped my arm, jerked me into the tiny Waiting Room. "Look there!"

The train had pulled up. Getting off it were Dr. Doyle, pipe in mouth, and Mr. Watson. They strode with an intent, purposeful air out of the station.

"What on earth brings *them* to Cowes?" I whispered.

"It can only be one thing,

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Bunny—the contents of Mr. Aristotle Andiakis' safe. That Southsea doctor's got on the trail somehow."

"The trail of what?"

"Horatio Nelson's blood-stained uniform, Bunny—in the safe on the S/Y *Achilleion*."

I felt stunned as we boarded the train. We had a compartment to ourselves. Raffles lighted a Sullivan as the train clattered along towards Ryde and the ferry-steamers. Never had I seen him so tense.

"What did you do?" I said.

"I shut the safe," said Raffles, "re-set the combination, wiped off everything I'd touched, and got off that yacht. I don't know what's going on, Bunny, but you and I want nothing to do with the *Victory* crime. As captain of the visiting cricket team, I must be at the ground when the match ends, then we'll get out of Portsmouth—and follow the *Victory* crime developments in the newspapers."

Next morning, in the newspapers, there was not one word about the *Victory* crime. The sudden, total silence on the subject seemed unnatural and sinister.

The cricket match ended just after five o'clock that afternoon, the Navy winning by six wickets. Raffles excused us from the usual post-match carouse. We went straight to The Lord Nelson Inn and packed our valises.

I carried mine into Raffles' room, added it to his valise and cricket-bag on the fourposter bed where many a bygone sea-captain had slept. His grey suit immaculate, a pearl in his cravat, Raffles was standing in the window-bay with its wide-open leaded-paned casements. He was smoking a cigarette and gazing out over Portsmouth Harbour.

"Look at the old *Victory*, Bunny," he said, as I joined him at the window, "lying peacefully at anchor out there—and keeping her secret."

Horse's hooves clacked on cobbles, harness jingled, wheels ground. A hansom pulled up, below. Two frockcoated, silk-hatted men stepped out—Dr. Conan Doyle and Mr. James Watson. They entered the Inn. We looked at each other.

"Can't be anything to do with us," Raffles said.

But we waited tensely. A firm knock sounded on the door. I had a sense of doom. Raffles called, "Come in," and the door opened. His silk hat, which he did not remove, almost touching the beams of the low ceiling, the Elm Grove doctor came in, followed by Mr. Watson.

"Just leaving?" Dr. Doyle

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said, noting instantly our luggage on the bed. "Mr. Raffles, there's a bill outstanding."

"Doctor," said Raffles, and I sensed and shared his relief as he glanced at his fingerstalled hand, "I'd clean forgotten this. How much do I owe you?"

"That depends. Watson, make sure that door is quite closed." The big doctor, his blue, direct eyes fixed on Raffles, took pipe and pouch from his pocket. "Mr. Raffles, let's discuss the *Victory* crime. First, the enigma of the Admiral's hat. Why was it not taken? Reflection suggested to me that the large. stiff hat was not amenable, like the blood-stained garments, to being tightly rolled-up for concealment in some receptacle—a receptacle that would have to be very quickly spirited off of *Victory*, since a minute search of the ship would have been in progress even before the distinguished guests left her. Perforce, those guests had to be regarded as above suspicion. They were neither questioned nor searched. Yet, even had one of them been guilty, in what receptacle could the uniform have been concealed?"

"One of the distinguished ladies' reticules?" Raffles suggested.

"Not big enough. However, Mr. Raffles, recall the scene of the fallen sailor's rescue. When we saw him pulled into the whaleboat, a number of objects bobbed around on the water —objects flung from *Victory* and from several sightseeing craft, including the tug *Jezebel*. I refer to lifebelts."

The doctor lighted his pipe, exhaling smoke under his bushy moustache, his steady eyes always on Raffles.

"I came to the conclusion that Nelson's bloodstained uniform left his old flagship inside one of her own lifebelts—prepared beforehand by cutting out part of the cork, thus hollowing the lifebelt, then plugging the orifice with part of the cut-out cork and roughly stitching back the canvas cover. The prepared lifebelt was then concealed in *Victory*'s wardroom. All the man who chloroformed the Marine sentry had then to do was slash the stitches of the canvas, pull out the cork plug, thrust the tightly-rolled uniform into the orifice, and replace the cork plug. Meantime, every eye on board *Victory* —except his own—was watching the Queen pass. But for that lifebelt to be thrown overboard by the man, almost certainly a member of *Victory*'s crew, somebody had to fall into the water."

"Able-Seaman John S. Hayter," said Dr. Doyle's companion.

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"Just so, Watson. The intrepid foretopman and his crewmate confederate co-ordinated their respective actions to the minute-guns of the royal salute, while other confederates, in one of the sightseeing small craft, watched for their fellow-conspirator, the chloroformer, to throw the relevant lifebelt, so that they could retrieve and make off with it in the confusion of the rescue."

"Quite simple, really," said Dr. Doyle's companion.

"When analysed, Watson, and explained."

"I trust I did not, by my inadvertent remark—"

"By no means, Watson." But the Elm Grove doctor's keen eyes remained fixed on Raffles. "Inquiry at the Navy Records Office provided me with the home address of Seaman Hayter, who proved to be a Portsmouth-born man, like many sailors. Mr. Watson and I visited that address, a small restaurant owned by his mother—a woman from the Greek island of Corfu. From 1815 until 1863 in this century, Corfu was under British jurisdiction, and Hayter's mother, a Corfu girl, married a British sailor, Hayter's late father. Their Portsmouth-born son, Able-Seaman Hayter, was brought up—due to the mother—with loyalties divided between Britain, land of his father, and Greece, the land of his mother. But these are simple people."

The doctor puffed thoughtfully at his pipe.

"Seaman Hayter is still in Haslar Naval Hospital with a dislocated shoulder. Could a foretopman, certainly a physical type, have conceived and co-ordinated the *Victory* crime? Improbable. Could his crewmate confederate—no doubt a man of the same type and, on the evidence of the chloroformed Marine, remarkably strong—have conceived the crime? Improbable. No, Mr. Raffles, those men were *paid* by somebody. Whose was the *mind* behind the *Victory* crime?"

Raffles and I both knew. But we neither moved nor spoke.

"Our local newspaper, the *Portsmouth and Southsea Chronicle*," said Dr. Doyle, "published a list of the distinguished persons invited to be present on board *Victory* on Navy Day. The newspaper published a second list—those invited guests who actually were on board *Victory* on that day. On comparing the lists, I noted that, of the yacht-owning visitors at Cowes, who had all received invitations to *Victory*, only one had not availed himself of the invitation."

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"Mr. Aristotle Andiakis," said Mr. Watson, "of the S/Y *Achilleion*."

"Precisely, Watson. Mr. Andiakis. A powerful mind—a Greek mind. A man, moreover, with seamen at his disposal—the crew of the *Achilleion*—to pose as sightseers and, in some hired boat, manoeuvre into a convenient position to pick up the lifebelt flung for them from *Victory*."

Dr. Doyle tamped down the tobacco in his pipe.

"Why was Mr. Andiakis not on board *Victory*? Was it from fear of personal involvement in the crime he possibly had planned? I wondered. I noted an absence of violence in the crime. Seaman Hayter's dislocated shoulder was unforeseeable. The Marine sentry was not brutally blackjacked, as would have been quicker and easier. He was harmlessly chloroformed. Was Mr. Andiakis, then, if his was in fact the mind behind the crime, a man of some nicety of scruple—sufficient nicety, perhaps, to decline to be a guest on board a ship he planned to rob? To you personally, Mr. Raffles, would such a scruple be comprehensible?"

I did not like the question. I could sense trouble coming. But Raffles said quietly, "Yes, Dr. Doyle, it would."

"But if Mr. Aristotle Andiakis," said the Elm Grove doctor, "were a man of scruple, what possible motive could he have for so drastic a deed as the illicit acquisition of a national treasure of the British nation?"

"I cannot imagine," said Raffles. "Unless—" He stopped.

"Something has occurred to you?" said Dr. Doyle.

"The Thracian Marbles," said Raffles.

"Ah!" said Dr. Doyle. "You read the London *Times*. So do I. And when I recalled a long-standing wrangle in its correspondence columns about the moral right of the British Museum to possess those ancient bas-reliefs commemorating a battle as important in Greek history as is the battle of Traflagar in British history, I felt sure of my ground."

"Dr. Doyle," said Mr. Watson, "immediately invited me to accompany him to the Isle-of-Wight."

"To Cowes, Watson, to be precise. Millionaires! Millionaires were all around us there. But some things," said Dr. Conan Doyle, "cannot be bought with minted money. We found Mr. Andiakis absent from his yacht. He was being granted the extremely unusual privilege of being received in audience by our Queen at her

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summer residence, Osborne House. Mr. Watson and I were invited on board the yacht to await his return. On his arrival, I immediately accused him of being in possession of the uniform in which Horatio Nelson died at Trafalgar."

In this room, in this ancient waterfront inn, there was for a moment no sound.

"Realising," Dr. Conan Doyle said, then, "that I had found him out, Mr. Andiakis immediately—under seal of secrecy—confided to me the outcome of his audience with Her Majesty. Mr. Raffles, the Nelson uniform is in due course to be returned to the Royal Navy Museum at Greenwich. In due course, in return, the Thracian Marbles will be restored to Greece, the ancient land of their origin. By command of Her Majesty, no explanation will ever be given. But, as to this—well, a danger exists."

My heart thumped slow, stifling. I could not breathe.

"Mr. Raffles," said the South-sea doctor, "Mr. Andiakis' possession of the Nelson uniform became known—last night—to an intruder. The safe on the S/Y *Achilleion* was opened."

I stared at the floor. Raffles was as still as a statue.

"I asked Mr. Andiakis," Dr. Doyle said, "if Mr. Watson and I might see the uniform. You've read, you told me, my story, *A Study in Scarlet*. Nelson's blood is not scarlet. Time has blackened those honoured stains. But I noticed a faint red blemish on Nelson's swallowtail blue epauletted coat. Blood, Mr. Raffles. Mr. Andiakis assured me that, when he set the combination of the safe just before leaving for his audience with the Queen, that blemish of fresh red blood was not on the coat."

"Dr. Doyle," said the big doctor's companion, "thereupon made a close examination of the safe's exterior—"

"And found on the carpet before it something that led me to the conclusion that the intruder had been wearing a finger-stall." Coldly blue as an arctic iceberg, Dr. Doyle's eyes were fixed on Raffles. "For greater tactile sensitivity in the manipulation of that relatively simple combination-lock, the intruder took off his fingerstall. For greater sensitivity still, he removed from the finger, probably with his teeth, two surgical stitches and, with his tongue, flicked them from his mouth. I have them—together with my bill, Mr. Raffles—in this envelope."

So it had come. Raffles was exposed. We were finished. I could not swallow the great lump in my throat.

"Seaman Hayter," Dr. Doyle

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said, "and his bosun confederate in *Victory*'s crew will not be charged before a Court of Admiralty. They are no longer in the Royal Navy. They have been bought out by Mr. Andiakis and will be employed in his merchant-shipping fleet. Further, because a ban of silence has been imposed on every facet of the *Victory* crime, the intruder last night on S/Y *Achilleion* cannot be charged at Winchester Assizes. I don't know why you left the Nelson uniform where you found it, Mr. Raffles. Perhaps the devil looks after his own. You remain free to catch your train. But I, personally, have a bill to present. I shall hold it pending. If ever, traceable to you or your friend Manders, there comes to my ears any mention of what you know about Mr. Andiakis, I shall seek you out, Mr. A. J. Raffles, and infallibly present my bill—at a price a great deal higher than you will care to pay."

The doctor of Bush Villas, Elm Grove, knocked out his pipe-bowl into an ashtray on the dressing-table.

"To each," his strong voice said, "his own. To every nation, the mystery of its own soul, which is born of its past. Our Queen grows old. Her heart has known sorrow, but in that heart is the pride of kings. And the man who stood before her in Osborne House last night is a king among men—a self-made aristocrat, an Odysseus of our own century. He was confident of the lady to whom he spoke, and he knew how to present his case to her. He quoted to her four lines from one of her favourite poets, Lord Macaulay:

For how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds
For the ashes of his fathers
And the temples of his gods?

And that great Greek gentleman, Mr. Aristotle Andiakis, told me that the little, aging, indomitable Widow looked long at him. Then she turned to her Private Secretary and said, 'In this matter of the Thracian Marbles, convey to Ten Downing Street this, Our Royal Command: *Let right be done.*' "

Staring blindly at the floor, I heard the door open.

"Come, Watson."

The door-latch clicked shut.

Neither Raffles nor I moved.

Through the open window-casements, the breeze from the sea blew cool and salty upon us. Thinly over Portsmouth Harbour floated the bugle notes of the day's end call, "Retreat." The report of the sunset gun clapped across the water. From the masthead of H.M.S. *Victory*, as on all the Queen's ships at their anchors, the flag of her Realm fluttered down.

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I heard Raffles draw in his breath, deeply.

"From now on, Bunny," he said, "an unsettled bill hangs over us."

"In account," I muttered, "with Dr. A. Conan Doyle."

"Or in account," Raffles said, in a strange tone, "with the other name he uses for himself—in the pages of that story."

On the fourposter bed, with our valises and Raffles' cricket-bag, lay the copy of *A Study in Scarlet*.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Not only does Mr. Manders' foregoing narrative, now at last become available, seem to explain the official silence which for so long has enshrouded the circumstances of the *Victory* crime, but it appears also to corroborate a perceptive remark made by Mr. John Dickson Carr on page 194 of his *Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (Harper & Row, 1949).

"When we consider," remarks Mr. Carr, "Conan Doyle's detective work in the case of George Edalji, we may ask ourselves a question to which the answer will be self-evident: Who *was* Sherlock Holmes?"

In Mr. Carr's book appears a photograph of Dr. Conan Doyle taken at approximately the period of the *Victory* crime, together with a photograph of the handwriting and signature of Mr. James Watson, Secretary of the Portsmouth & Southsea Literary & Scientific Society.

H.M.S. *Victory,* now preserved in drydock, may still be visited in Portsmouth Harbor, and the uniform stained with the lifeblood of Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson may be viewed today in the Royal Navy Museum at Greenwich.

Due, presumably, to the official sequestration of documents touching upon the *Victory* crime, no mention of it appears in Mr. Carr's book, but it may be of interest to note that the Thracian Marbles were quietly returned to Greece not long after the events described by Mr. Manders in his private writings about the career of his friend, A. J. Raffles.

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a *NEW* short story by

URSULA CURTISS

What Jason did so unexpectedly were small things; but their significance was staggering to those who knew him. What did it mean? What had made Jason change? Charles looked desperately for the meaning, for the elusive "unthinkable pattern" . . . A subtle story, subtly told, with a whiplash revelation . . .

THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE

by URSULA CURTISS

Nothing could have seemed less menacing than the first of the activities which set tongues wagging in Earlsgate Crescent that June. It was merely the sight of Jason Willoughby carrying the garbage out one evening to the smokeless burner behind the house. Singular, yes; Betsy Gifford, who spotted this phenomenon, pronounced herself as stunned as if she had discovered him dancing around a Maypole without benefit of clothes.

Because Jason Willoughby was simply not a man who carried out garbage—or washed the car or trundled heavy bags of groceries or lifted a finger in the small vegetable garden; not when he had a devoted wife to do all these things for him. To call him selfish and demanding was like describing a hurricane as breezy.

Even the other husbands of Earlsgate Crescent, who might have been expected to salute him, however furtively, were disapproving. Great selfishness had to be offset by vast charm if it were to be tolerated at all, but Jason Willoughby—a handsome 35 with an expensive-looking droop to his eyelids —always managed to convey the impression, on social occasions with his neighbors, that he was honoring an impulsive and ill-conceived promise.

On the other hand everybody liked Margaret Willoughby —except Charles Hunt, who loved her. He had managed to keep this fact a secret by not

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avoiding her and by taking out the girls foisted on him by well-meaning matrons. The girls were frequently attractive, but none of them had Margaret's beautiful near-sighted gray-blue eyes with the frankly 32-year-old lines at the corners, or her fierce and misplaced dedication. The girls were deft and sure-handed; you would never catch them adorned with Band Aids or other running repairs. Why he should have found accident-prone Margaret so lovable Charles could not have explained, but he found her just that.

It came down to a very basic equation: Margaret loved Jason, Charles loved Margaret, Jason loved Jason—and here, all of a sudden, was Jason performing menial tasks.

Why?

There was a good deal of speculation in the Crescent, especially on the Saturday when Jason was seen washing the car. Betsy Gifford said, "Maybe Margaret's been left a lot of money. *That* would make his heart beat faster"; and Dr. J. Hughes Foster, who was an obstetrician and tended to think in only one direction, said, "Obvious. She's pregnant."

But these two theories were swiftly disposed of. Margaret's parents were dead and she was an only child; there was no one to leave her money. Betsy Gifford, who was expecting a baby in November, made circuitous approaches and learned that Margaret was not pregnant. "Maybe," said a starry-eyed new resident admitted to these councils, "Mr. Willoughby just did some, you know, soul-searching, and decided to turn over a new leaf."

"Jason Willoughby in search of his soul," said Charles's landlady trenchantly, "is on a fool's errand."

In early July attention turned elsewhere: the Van Burens' son, who had been an Eagle Scout, came shambling home from his first year of college and a round of visits to relatives in the Southwest with hair like long black Brillo, jeans with spectacular rents, a disconcerting habit of rocking his shoulders and snapping his fingers as he talked, and a female companion with owlish glasses and large bare feet.

Charles had a moment of entertainment when he thought the girl would look well loaded with panniers, then went back to a notion that filled him with terror. Margaret *seemed* well, tanned if a little thinner from her gardening efforts, but suppose—

No, Jason Willoughby wasn't a monster. If Margaret had been to a doctor and received

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some terrible prognosis, even Jason would have changed his habits. Oh, God, thought Charles, watching Jason tie up tomato plants with the clumsy motions of someone new to it, that must be it.

He lay in wait, because this was an area in which he wanted his reassurances first-hand. His apartment was three houses away from the Willoughbys', and, as a writer, he had the advantage of being constantly in residence. He was there on an afternoon heavy with thunder when Margaret drove by. At first she appeared to have a passenger beside her; memory translated that into a great heap of clothes from the cleaner's.

Charles shot out of his apartment, sauntered the rest of the way, and was at the car in time to say casually, as Margaret ducked inside, "Can I give you a hand with that?"

"Oh, hello, Charles, would you?" Her dark hair was shiny even in this subdued and threatening light, the whites of her eyes snowy in the grateful glance she gave him. Charles wondered absurdly what she would do if he asked her to stick out her tongue. Her right wrist was bandaged, as was so often the case, and as though she felt his clinical attention she said, "The handle of the iron came loose when I wasn't expecting it. I burned a gigantic hole in one of Jason's best shirts."

Well, of course. Jason Willoughby would not descend to no-iron shirts like other men. Come to that, most if not all the clothes inside the slippery transparent bags were masculine—was he planning on a trip? A long one?

Charles was still turning that over in his mind when Margaret used her key and said, "Thanks very much—just dump everything on the couch and I'll put them away later," and consulted the clock. "Jason ought to be home any minute. You'll have a drink, I hope."

Charles said he would; he was determined to quell his own fears if possible. All the subtle approaches he had planned fled out of his head at the sight of Margaret tranquilly getting out an ice tray and three glasses as if—forget the third glass—as if it were natural and right for them to be alone at this relaxed end-of-the-day moment. Relaxed? He was so tense with the effort of not getting up to be beside her in that small space, to put his hand over hers as she lifted down bottles, that blank seconds went by until Margaret said, like throwing a lifeline, "How's your sister?"

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Barbara had come to visit him in the spring, and she and Margaret had liked each other at once. "Fine. Trouble is," said Charles, regaining a measure of cunning, "she's just had her annual checkup and now she's after me to have one, although I've told her I'm sound in wind and limb."

"Well, you know," said Margaret, pouring Scotch, "it isn't a bad idea. I know it's a horrible nuisance and they certainly don't do it for nothing, but Jason shipped me off for mine a month ago and it's sort of reassuring to know everything's in order and working."

Charles could almost have closed his eyes with relief, but was glad he didn't. At the sound of a slammed car door in the driveway Margaret said, "Here's Jason," and something extraordinary happened to her face; it became electrical and—driven? As though every tiny muscle responded to a summons, so that her cheekbones became higher, her eyes wider, her skin more taut. It might have been pleasure and expectation; to Charles, who had never seen her awaiting her husband before, it looked unavoidable, like the answer to a challenge.

Jason, his seersucker jacket hooked over his shoulder until Margaret sprang to put it on a hanger, greeted Charles with the cordiality he might have extended to an insurance salesman at the end of a long hot harassed day. He shot a penetrating look at the glistening burden on the couch, picked it up, and walked through an inner door with it, then came back to say handsomely to Charles, "Finish your drink," as though that might be Charles's last chance at a cocktail for the foreseeable future.

Charles didn't finish it. Mission accomplished, he said to himself as he walked home. There was nothing wrong with Margaret's health, and she had had her checkup at her husband's urging. All as it should be, so why did he feel that there was something —gathering in that house?

Instinctively, almost superstitiously, he glanced at the sky, and a trickle of frozen silver flashed through the plummy clouds overhead and was followed almost at once by more thunder and the first missile-like drops of rain. He actually stopped in his tracks and half turned before he convinced himself that he was a nervous fool, that nothing had just exploded in that calm and pretty room.

On Saturday Jason did the grocery shopping.

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It was doubtful if he had bought so much as a quart of milk since his marriage, and Charles watched him in amazement from the partial shelter of a magazine rack. Jason proceeded along the shelves like a man in a minefield, wheeling his basket in a fashion at once demeaned and haughty, picking up cans and examining the labels as though they were written in a foreign language. The meat department seemed to hold special bafflements, and after toying indecisively with a number of packages he leaned across the counter and apparently sought advice from a butcher.

It never entered Charles's head to walk boldly out of concealment and accost Jason. He wished briefly for the presence of, say, Sue Cassidy, the latest of the girls introduced to him by Betsy Gifford. Sue was very serious-minded—whenever Charles looked deep into her melting brown eyes he seemed to see tiny brisk messages there, like "Have you voted?"—but she didn't *look* serious-minded and she could have wheedled some explanation from Jason.

Jason had become tired of wheeling his basket around. He abandoned it impassably in the middle of the aisle and departed in a direction which would take him to relishes and salad dressings. Charles left the magazine rack at such speed that he stepped cruelly on the sandaled foot of a woman in curlers, apologized perfunctorily to a face dumb with anguish, and made a rapid inventory of Jason's basket, a thing he considered offensive when people did it to him. Paper plates, a package of ground round, hamburger rolls, mustard, pickles—all suggestive of a picnic.

But Jason's Sundays were devoted exclusively to golf.

Charles escaped down an aisle strangely labeled *Coffee, Tea and Insecticides*, and at the checkout counter bought a pair of sunglasses that closely resembled Margaret Willoughby's. Ten minutes later he was holding them out to her on her shadowed front lawn, saying, "I saw these on the sidewalk when I was driving by. They're yours, aren't they?"

"No," said Margaret at once. "Mine are prescription, but thanks very much anyway. I'm as blind as a bat beyond ten feet."

"I owe you a drink," said Charles, watching her face carefully. "Maybe you and Jason could come over at noon or so tomorrow?"

"We can't, thanks, Charles, we're going to the beach." Her

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eyes were so brilliant they looked almost dazed—was that the heat, or surprise because for once her husband was going to devote a portion of the weekend to her? "It's supposed to be hot again tomorrow, and high tide's at around two. We're going to cook out on the rocks."

"Maybe next week then," said Charles, and went home with his false sunglasses.

"Howie Van Buren and that girl have run off to California," reported his landlady when he delivered the pound of butter she had commissioned him to buy.

"She's got good feet for grape trampling," said Charles absently. "I saw Jason Willoughby at the store, by the way."

"Did you now," said Mrs. Spain deeply. "Well, I think I've figured that out. You know how he's never home on weekends? Suppose he's not golfing but off with a lady friend, and Margaret found out about it and threatened to leave him? He's a man who likes his comfort, God knows, and he'd never find another woman to fetch and carry for him the way she does. All these errands are instead of candy and flowers. If you ask me, Howie Van Buren is on marijuana or something worse. His poor mother said she saw him talking to a cat for five minutes."

"The time to really worry is when she hears the cat talking back," said Charles.

Ironically, he felt almost lighthearted at Mrs. Spain's explanation of Jason Willoughby's odd behavior. A man of such ego would feel threatened indeed by the possible loss of such a tireless, dedicated wife and might well hope to woo her back by taking on alien labors like gardening, car washing, and shopping.

And here Charles had been thinking—he could spell it out to himself now—that there had been something infinitely chilling in the air, something that endangered Margaret's very life.

Sunday was hot again, as predicted. Charles found himself telephoning Sue Cassidy and suggesting the beach, because somehow two people in such a scene were more invisible than a lone man, and felt absolved of any guilt whatever when Sue, ravishing in a strawberry-strewn terry robe which suggested no bathing suit at all underneath, insisted on first dropping off political flyers to volunteers at three supermarkets. "Boyd is going to be a *marvelous* man for District

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Three," she confided, and Charles said, "Good. Great," with the heartiness of the non-listener.

Because, during the night, he had looked at the other side of the coin. *If* Jason Willoughby had an extra-marital interest and Margaret had found him out, she would reject divorce with the flatness of a mother rejecting an institution for a retarded child. What she felt for him might not be love, by now, but the deep and damaging habit of a phonograph needle caught in a groove with no one to lift it out. In any case she would wait out an affair, stoically—but what if Jason didn't want her to wait?

Margaret was accident-prone, as everybody knew. People would be shocked but not incredulous if she dived too deep or missed her footing on one of the massive rocks that made an arm curving into the Sound and hit her head fatally.

But then why everything that had gone before?

Charles had almost caught it at some pre-dawn hour, when he had wakened damp and shaken at an unthinkable pattern very clear to see if you looked at it from the right perspective. Not money, not material gain . . . A cigarette had only served to drive it further away, and by morning he had nothing to go on but the conviction that he must be here on the beach, because he was certain Jason had completed his preliminaries.

Was Margaret aware? Was she walking half-willingly toward her doom?

"Why are we at this end of the beach?" asked Sue crossly, stepping over the shell of a horseshoe crab in Charles's determined wake. "We don't have to cook, I've brought sandwiches."

With fires discouraged on the beach itself, the rocks were for the most part the refuge of families preoccupied with their lunch and their young. A good deal of lotion applying went on, and slapping of small hands away from marshmallows before the ritual toasting, and settling of quarrels among children cranky with the heat, and admonitions to the older ones to look after the younger ones when they ventured down onto the little arc of beach below the rocks. This was where the adult eyes would be drawn, to cries of "Watch me! Watch me!" followed by handstands in the shallow water.

Charles thought about all this as he pretended not to hear Sue. He stared out along the arm of rocks, seeing a lone and unattended fire there, seized by fear that gave him an actual pain in his chest. (Margaret, to

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Jason: "Charles asked us for a drink but I told him we were going to take our lunch to the beach." Jason, carelessly, as the morning deepened, "Why don't we go right now?")

Sue and her flyers . . . and then, just as Charles was finding it difficult to breathe, Margaret's white-capped head in the water almost at the point of the rocks. Inexplicably, unless he had been there in the sun dazzle all the time, a strange swimmer appeared, farther out, a dark-goggled, beige-capped man who had no business being so far from shore; his stroke was weak and wide.

Nothing like Jason's powerful crawl.

The beige-capped man had evidently realized his predicament, and so had Margaret; when the dark-goggled head disappeared briefly she reversed direction and struck out after him, her arms cutting strongly through the silvered glisten of the water.

The glisten . . .

"I'm as blind as a bat beyond ten feet . . ."

Sue must have said something plaintive about a hard-boiled egg, but Charles only translated and discarded it after he had surfaced from a shallow running dive. Although he tried to close his mind to everything but getting the maximum effort from heart and lungs, arms and legs, the thought slipped through that a man who had been planning for weeks to kill his wife might have come to believe that his victim would avoid him in the water.

And there were fatalities every summer, when panicky swimmers dragged their would-be rescuers down. Discard the cap and goggles, appear to be too late to save his wife, pretend to hunt furiously for the irresponsible stranger who had brought about her death—

Charles rounded the point, lungs protesting, air tasting literally sweet when he gulped it in, and came upon Jason, his hand braced firmly in a crevice of rock, holding Margaret patiently underwater against its slippery side with the full strength of his leg.

In spite of Jason's bent-bow position his attitude looked quite calm, that of a man with nothing to fear from observation by a few seagulls. An oyster boat was a barely discernible outline on the horizon, and the buffeting wind and seethe of surf here had deafened him to any approach.

Charles trod water, filled his lungs again searingly, clipped a forearm against Jason's throat

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with all the force he could muster, pushed savagely, and dove for Margaret. Hand braced where Jason had braced his, he had to slap her hard between the shoulders before she began to choke out water and gasp.

Jason had surfaced again. "That was close," he said breathlessly. "I—"

Charles was still heaving for air, but he managed to say, "If you come near her again I'll kill you."

He didn't watch Jason swim away—with what tale? Charles found a rock outcropping to hang onto and moved Margaret's hand to the crevice where his had been, because neither of them could attempt the return to shore just yet. And Margaret said presently, "He's been so—these last weeks —I think he's mad."

Mad? Charles chose to conserve his breath. Later Margaret would put together for herself the appalling pattern that almost revealed itself to him during the night; but now wasn't the time.

It was the sheen of the water, reminding him sharply of the glistening cleaner's bags on the couch in the Willoughby house, that had shot it sharply into focus minutes ago. Jason's entire wardrobe, cleaned. His sudden familiarization with domestic chores. He couldn't marry again immediately without arousing talk and suspicion; there would have to be a respectable interlude.

Jason Willoughby, embracing his own comfort as another man might embrace religion, had been practising to be a widower.

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a *NEW* pastiche by

JON L. BREEN

It was inevitable—that Jon L. Breen would write a pastiche of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot. Mr. Breen has already written pastiche-parodies of S. S. Van Dine's Philo Vance, Ed McBain's 87th Precinct, Frank Merriwell, Ellery Queen's E.Q., John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee, Earl Derr Biggers' Charlie Chan, J. J. Marric's (John Creasey's) Gideon, John Dickson Carr's H. M. Merrivale and Dr. Gideon Fell, Emma Lathen's John Putnam Thatcher, Dick Francis, Hugh Pentecost's John Jericho and Pierre Chambrun—all of which have appeared in EQMM (and we are still hoping for an L. Frank Baum pastiche or parody in which the detective is Dorothy and the Ozian Professor Moriarty is the Wonderful Wizard, or in which Dorothy is again the damsel in distress and the Wizard is the detective).

Mr. Breen is undoubtedly our foremost pastichist-parodist, and no one in the genre is safe from his penetrating pen, his telling typewriter. Here, then, is his first bull's-eye of Hercule Poirot. And there is only one further comment we will make: the solution-conception behind this Poirot pastiche is brilliantly AgathaChristiean . . .

HERCULE POIROT IN THE YEAR 2010

by JON L. BREEN

"It's *Mrs.* Harbottle," the elderly lady insisted to the ticket taker on the New York-London underground. "Missus, spelled M-I-S-S-U-S." She fumbled with her change and her ticket and walked away muttering to herself. I'm proud I was Justin Harbottle's wife, she thought, and proud to be his

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widow and none of this miz rubbish. Here in America, you'd think they'd never heard of miss and missus.

She sat in the window seat of the six-passenger compartment, fumbling with her parcels. She did like a window seat, though there was little reason to covet one on the New York-London underground. Little reason for a window at all really, since there was nothing to see. She hoped her seat-mates would be nice. Forty-five minutes is a long time to spend with strangers, especially when one is getting on and every minute is precious.

The young gentleman who took the seat across from her nodded pleasantly. He was a nice-looking gentleman, but there was something about him that spelled foreigner to her. Not American foreigner, of course, but European foreigner. Which was silly really, as her children so often reminded her, since in the United States of Europe every European is every Briton's countryman; but it was hard for a girl—a lady—who had grown up in a time when they were all different countries to adjust to the changing times.

Let her children laugh—they were kind really, understanding even when she insisted on modestly wearing her bikini when they went to the beach at Brighton, though the French and Italian and even the California beaches were now so much more accessible.

More passengers. An American man and his wife. Even now you could always tell an American. They were so impatient, always glancing at their watches. The wife was nice-looking, but the husband looked a brute, like a rock singer of her youth, though of course rock singers would be before his time no doubt. Or would they? It was so hard to keep track of the time going by.

Would they be going soon? No, there's one more passenger. Looks a big heavy-set man. Why, it was Gaylord Tenney, Mr. Harbottle's former business partner! Mrs. Harbottle was terribly embarrassed. Not that she held a grudge against Tenney for having cheated Justin Harbottle out of his half of the business and hastened his death, but surely Tenney would be equally embarrassed to find her sitting there. It would be a terribly awkward experience.

She almost got up and rushed off to await the next car, but after all, she wanted to get home to London and one couldn't let other people run one's life, especially someone like Gaylord Tenney who had done enough damage already.

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But he didn't look the slightest bit embarrassed. He merely nodded all around and opened his newspaper calmly, as if none of his fellow passengers was anyone he recognized. But Mrs. Harbottle felt a general stiffening, as if the remaining passengers either knew him or sensed the sort of character he was behind his dignified mustache and tastefully tailor-made gray suit that would have passed muster even in the more sartorially exacting seventies of Mrs. Harbottle's youth. Imagine the cheek of the man, just sitting there like that!

Well, as Mrs. Harbottle had always told herself, one would just have to make the best of it.

Alice Lane nudged her husband almost imperceptibly and got no reaction. Nudging him more perceptibly, she heard a whispered "I know, I know." So he had recognized Gaylord Tenney as well. Right here in the same car with them, going to London.

The devil with him, Alice said to herself, fixing her chin determinedly. So he was going to England—her ancestral home, Counterbridge House, the last stately home left in England, was hers and no one else's. Tenney didn't have a leg to stand on with his false claim, so there was no need to worry.

She cast a fond glance at her husband. He was so American! Could he be happy in an English country mansion with an acre and a half of vast inherited lands? True, she was of the American side of the family and had never been to England, but she'd seen so many of those historical TV programs imported from the BBC that she knew she would feel right at home.

No need to think any more about Gaylord Tenney. Counterbridge House would be hers, an acre and a half all hers to roam in this crowded world.

Alex Lane looked at his watch for the hundredth time. Why weren't they moving, blast it? Not that there was any great hurry now—with that damned Gaylord Tenney in the same car they would arrive in London simultaneously.

Alex ran a hand through his unfashionably long and sleek black hair. Was Tenney's claim to Counterbridge any good? Who could tell? But, if it was, the ten million dollars Alex was counting on from the sale of Counterbridge House to the television interests would fly out the window and Alex Lane would be ruined financially.

He fingered the letter in his pocket, the letter making the offer. Still there. He hadn't told

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Alice about it yet, but that would come in time.

Sven Petrocelli felt the slight rumble that meant the New York-London underground was getting under way. Good. Finally. Once it got going the ride would be so smooth you couldn't tell it from standing still. A quick transfer to the Peking line and he'd be in China by dinnertime. But it would have to be a quick transfer.

Could he make it before Gaylord Tenney had an opportunity to give him away to Scotland Yard? How they'd like to get him, but only Tenney knew who he was and only Tenney could denounce him.

If only some kind soul would eliminate Tenney.

Plunge the car into darkness first—that would be easy enough to do. Any experienced underground traveler would know it could be done by pulling the alarm switch next to each seat, an action that could easily be taken out of the view of the other passengers. The switches, obsolete now, had been quite necessary during the transport war of the 1990's. Then, of course, a quick thrust of some sharp implement into Tenney's heart, and back into the seat quickly before the lights went back on. Who would know which of them did it?

If only someone would do that.

Maybe someone is planning it and that's why *I* thought of it, Sven mused. He had had some mind-reading training before the trouble, but it was dangerous to delve any further in that area without really knowing what you were doing. Instead, Sven would concentrate on willing Tenney dead.

What a tense group they were, Mrs. Harbottle mused. She made a tentative attempt to start some conversation.

"Are you French?" she asked the young, foreign-looking gentleman.

He seemed to bristle. "I am European," he said, in an indeterminate accent. "And so I believe are you."

"Yes," she said, determined to ignore his rudeness. Well, he wasn't French then, or he'd have proudly proclaimed it. "Will you be staying long in London?"

A rueful smile played at the corners of his mouth. "Not any longer than I can help," he said. Seeing Mrs. Harbottle's face, he added hastily, "Not that I mean to reflect poorly on London, one of our greatest European cities."

A little mollified, she thought, He's not a European at all.

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No true European talks that silly patriotic way. True he doesn't look Chinese, but—

The young foreigner seemed to be a thousand miles away, and their brief conversation was definitely concluded. What was he thinking about so hard?

Alice Lane found the English lady so tiresome. She tried to engage her on the subject of British history, but all she could talk about was shopping, shopping.

"Yes, I often shop in America. Not New York, it's so expensive, just like London really."

Obviously not upper class. Oh, for some intelligent conversation to take her mind off Tenney. But conversation with whom? The young man looked to be meditating, Alex was tense and stiff as a board, and one could hardly start a conversation with Tenney himself.

How could he sit there so calmly, reading his newspaper, knowing there were at least two people in the car who could cheerfully murder him? How?

Alice paused in her thoughts to scream. The car was suddenly plunged into darkness. She sensed movement about her but could not tell who was moving where.

The lights were off perhaps thirty seconds, though it seemed a half hour. Toward the end, amid unindifferentiated gasps and groans, Mrs. Harbottle piped up cheerfully, "Well, I think we have a bit of a problem. No need to worry, though."

"No need to worry," Alex Lane echoed in a near-hysterical voice. "Who knows how deep we are in the Atlantic, in total darkness, with no—"

He broke off when the lights went back on. More gasps and shrieks were vented as the four surviving passengers viewed the body of Gaylord Tenney, bleeding all over his newspaper, a dagger in his heart. Quite dead.

Sven Petrocelli might have observed with a faint smile on his face: Someone actually did it.

Alice Lane stared horror-stricken. Alex, she wanted to cry out loud, Alex, what have you done?

Alex Lane darted nervous eyes at his wife. If she goes to prison, he wondered, do I still get the property?

Mrs. Harbottle looked calmly at the body. I don't know who did this, she thought, I only know I didn't.

Just how old is he? Colonel Hart-Winston asked himself as he gazed across the desk at his

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visitor. One couldn't just ask, of course, that would never do, but one surely wondered, knowing something of the Belgian's past history. Let's see, it was now 2010, and he reportedly retired from the police early in the last century. Surely 150 was a conservative guess, but it hardly seemed possible. The egg-shaped head was smooth and unwrinkled, the mustaches as black as ever.

"Transplants, mon ami," said Hercule Poirot.

"Eh? What's that, Mr. Poirot?" Colonel Hart-Winston, jolted from his rather rude silence, turned even a shade redder than his norm. "Transplants, do you say?"

"But yes. My American doctor tells me I lead the league in transplants, though I don't know what league he refers to. And, more happily, artificial replacements. I was most pleased when I no longer had to depend on the unfortunate victims of accidents to keep me going. Very little of me, in any event, is the original part.

"Except, of course, the little gray cells. Those, I am pleased to say, are not amenable to transplant, and no method has been found to produce them artificially, though we all know what is being done with computers and androids and—but a thousand pardons, Colonel. I am growing garrulous in my old age, which you were so diligently attempting to guess at a moment ago."

"Forgive me. Intolerably rude. But how the deuce did you know I was speculating on your age? You don't read minds, surely?"

"Does the prospect alarm you?"

"Frankly, yes. This case has gone beyond the mind reader, which is about the only sort of detective left around these days. You're one of the few great detectives left, in the old sense."

"And with all the mind readers available, why do you suddenly need the old warhorse Poirot, so effectively put out of business by the new breed?"

"You'll be back in business before you know. Have you heard about Thought Therapy, Mr. Poirot?"

"A branch of psychiatry that gained importance in the 1980's, I believe. Most successful in curing serious mental disturbances. Do I gather that thought therapy is aiding criminals in escaping law enforcement?"

"We've been hearing for some time that thought therapists can teach people to so manipulate their conscious minds as to be immune to our thought readers. But I never had a specific ex-

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ample of it until our present case. I have four suspects in the murder of Gaylord Tenney —four suspects only—and one of them *has* to be the murderer. Anything else is physically impossible, and yet the thought readings on all four indicate innocence of the crime!

"I have only two alternatives: a physically impossible murder or some form of jamming our thought readings. I feel the latter is more likely, but in any case our people—highly strung mental gymnasts, you know the type—can do no more. Simple mind reading has been adequate to all crime-solving purposes for so long they know nothing else to do. That is why I have come to you."

"I have come to *you*."

"Yes, yes. Figuratively speaking, of course. Called you in. But, Mr. Poirot, I want your assurance you are not a mind reader. To employ an outside mind reader is against regulations, and really I hardly think you would do us much good if your old methods have been tainted with our new ones."

"Rest assured, sir, the little gray cells are still working."

"I'm relieved to hear it. I think the best starting point is for you to read the account of the murder that Ms. Oliver, our mind-wave recorder, has gleaned from the information of our mental investigators. I think you will find her account rather pleasantly old-fashioned in style. While you read, perhaps you will enjoy a glass of sherry?"

"A most interesting story," remarked Hercule Poirot. "How are you able to get all the thoughts of the persons on the train—and is it a train?—with such accuracy?"

"It's not generally known, Mr. Poirot, but when necessary we can recreate any thought on any underground car. As the term used to be, the cars are bugged. Of course, the thought records are only used in the case of a serious crime or other emergency such as this one. People must, after all, have some privacy, mustn't they? In any case, you see our problem. All think innocent, yet one must be guilty."

"A trifling problem for the little gray cells, mon ami."

"Trifling? Surely not."

"Quite trifling. Proof is another matter, however. If I could name the murderer, could you then use some extra mind-reading weapons to go a step deeper and dredge out the real evil thoughts underneath the innocent surface? For surely these thought therapists can only go so deep with their implantations."

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"Yes, I feel sure we could. But we cannot subject them all to that, Mr. Poirot. After all, the three innocent ones would have reason to complain. We could only proceed that way on one person and then only when we are sure."

"Bien. I, Hercule Poirot, am sure. Your stenographer, Ms. Oliver, is she, I wonder, some relative of an old friend of mine, Ariadne Oliver, the detective novelist?"

"Granddaughter, I believe. That's where she gets the style."

"I thought so. Dear Mrs. Oliver, a lovely gracious lady, and always looking for some new twist on the least-likely-person solution. The narrator did it, or the policeman did it, or a supposed victim did it, or everybody did it, or nobody did it. But one thing that Mrs. Oliver could never do, and she probably wished she could, was to follow the thoughts of one of her characters, have that character overtly think in an innocent way, say through thoughts that I am not guilty, I did not do it, and then turn out to be the murderer.

"That, of course, would be against the rules of fair play; it would be cheating, and thus forbidden. But now, at last, that is possible, and yet, alas, there is no one who writes detective novels any more. Truly a pity."

"You were about to name the murderer, Mr. Poirot," the colonel nodded.

"But of course. The key is the phenomenon of compensation. The person under thought therapy must concentrate very hard on *thinking innocent.* The *actually innocent* person does not. Therefore the person undergoing thought therapy must be a little bit stronger, a little more emphatic.

"This person feels a need not just to have normal thoughts and normal reactions of surprise and horror and the imputation of guilt to others. This person needs to think *in an innocent way,* to say in his thoughts: *I did not do it. I am not guilty.*

"And you will note only one of the suspects did this, only one had this uncharacteristic thought. You remember from Ms. Oliver's account that only one person thought: I don't know who did this; I only know I didn't."

"Mrs. Harbottle!" the colonel exclaimed, reaching for the phone.

Hercule Poirot sighed. "If only Mrs. Oliver could be here to see this."

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a HERCULE POIROT detective story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

One of the best of Agatha Christie's short stories about the "little man with the very fierce mustaches and an egg-shaped head"—none other than our old friend Hercule Poirot, whom you'll meet this time in "a resplendent dressing gown and embroidered slippers" . . . This case began with a commonplace, everyday occurrence. Patricia Garnett simply lost or mislaid the key to her flat. It's the kind of thing that can happen to any of us. But what happened after that was decidedly not commonplace . . .

THE THIRD FLOOR FLAT

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"Bother!" said Pat.

With a deepening frown she rummaged wildly in the silken trifle she called an evening bag. Two young men and another girl watched her anxiously. They were all standing outside the closed door of Patricia Garnett's flat.

"It's no good," said Pat. "It's not here. And now what shall we do?"

"What is life without a latchkey?" murmured Jimmy Faulkener.

He was a short broad-shouldered young man, with good-tempered blue eyes.

Pat turned on him angrily.

"Don't make jokes, Jimmy. This is serious."

"Look again, Pat," said Donovan Bailey. "It must be there somewhere."

He had a lazy pleasant voice that matched his lean dark figure.

"If you ever brought it," said the other girl, Mildred Hope.

"Of course I brought it," said Pat. "I believe I gave it to one of you two." She turned on the men accusingly. "I told Donovan to take it for me."

But she was not to find a scapegoat so easily. Donovan

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put in a firm disclaimer, and Jimmy backed him up.

"I saw you put it in your bag," said Jimmy.

"Well, then, one of you dropped it out when you picked up my bag. I've dropped it once or twice."

"Once or twice!" said Donovan. "You've dropped it a dozen times at least, besides leaving it behind on every possible occasion."

"I can't see why everything on earth doesn't drop out of it all the time," said Jimmy.

"The point is, how are we going to get in?" said Mildred.

She was a sensible girl who kept to the point, but she was not nearly so attractive as the impulsive and troublesome Pat.

All four of them regarded the closed door blankly.

"Couldn't the porter help?" suggested Jimmy. "Hasn't he got a master key or something of that kind?"

Pat shook her head. There were only two keys. One was inside the flat hung up in the kitchen and the other was—or should be—in the maligned bag.

"If only the flat were on the ground floor," wailed Pat. "We could have broken open a window or something. Donovan, you wouldn't like to be a cat burglar, would you?"

Donovan declined firmly but politely to be a cat burglar.

"A flat on the fourth floor is a bit of an undertaking," said Jimmy.

"How about a fire escape?" suggested Donovan.

"There isn't one."

"There should be," said Jimmy. "A building five stories high ought to have a fire escape."

"I daresay," said Pat. "But what should be doesn't help us. How am I to get into my flat?"

"Isn't there a sort of thingummybob?" said Donovan. "A thing the tradesmen send up chops and Brussels sprouts in?"

"The service lift," said Pat. "Oh, yes, but it's only a sort of wire-basket thing. Oh, wait, I know. What about the coal lift?"

"Now that," said Donovan, "is an idea."

Mildred made a discouraging suggestion.

"It'll be bolted," she said. "In Pat's kitchen, I mean, on the inside."

But the idea was instantly negatived.

"Don't you believe it," said Donovan.

"Not in *Pat's* kitchen," said Jimmy. "Pat never locks and bolts anything."

"I don't think it's bolted," said Pat. "I took the dust bin off this morning, and I'm sure I never bolted it afterwards, and

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I don't think I've been near it since."

"Well," said Donovan, "that fact's going to be very useful to us tonight but, all the same, young Pat, let me point out to you that these slack habits are leaving you at the mercy of burglars every night."

Pat disregarded these admonitions.

"Come on," she cried, and began racing down the four flights of stairs. The others followed her. Pat led them through a dark recess, apparently full to overflowing of perambulators, and through another door into the well of the flats, and guided them to the right lift. There was, at the moment, a dust bin on it. Donovan lifted it off and stepped gingerly onto the platform in its place. He wrinkled up his nose.

"A little noisome," he remarked. "But what of that? Do I go alone on this venture or is anyone coming with me?"

"I'll come, too," said Jimmy.

He stepped on by Donovan's side.

"I suppose the lift will bear me," he added doubtfully.

"You can't weigh much more than a ton of coal," said Pat, who had never been particularly strong on her weights-and-measures table.

"And anyway, we shall soon find out," said Donovan cheerfully, as he hauled on the rope.

With a grinding noise they disappeared from sight.

"This thing makes an awful noise," remarked Jimmy, as they passed up through blackness. "What will the people in the other flats think?"

"Ghosts or burglars, I expect," said Donovan. "Hauling this rope is heavy work. The porter of Friars Mansions does more work than I ever suspected. I say, Jimmy, old son, are you counting the floors?"

"Oh, Lord, no. I forgot."

"Well, I have, which is just as well. That's the third we're passing now. The next is ours."

"And now, I suppose," grumbled Jimmy, "we shall find that Pat *did* bolt the door after all."

But these fears were unfounded. The wooden door swung back at a touch and Donovan and Jimmy stepped out into the inky blackness of Pat's kitchen.

"We ought to have a flashlight for this wild night work," explained Donovan. "If I know Pat, everything's on the floor, and we shall smash endless crockery before I can get to the light switch. Don't move about, Jimmy, till I get the light on."

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He felt his way cautiously over the floor, uttering one fervent "Damn!" as a corner of the kitchen table took him unawares in the ribs. He reached the switch, and in another moment another "Damn!" floated out of the darkness.

"What's the matter?" asked Jimmy.

"Light won't go on. Dud bulb, I suppose. Wait a minute, I'll turn the sitting-room light on."

The sitting room was the door immediately across the passage. Jimmy heard Donovan go out of the door, and presently fresh muffled curses reached him. He himself edged his way cautiously across the kitchen.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know. Rooms get bewitched at night, I believe. Everything seems to be in a different place. Chairs and tables where you least expected it. Oh, hell, here's another!"

But at this moment Jimmy fortunately connected with the electric-light switch and in another minute the two young men were looking at each other in silent horror.

This room was not Pat's sitting room. *They were in the wrong flat.*

To begin with, the room was about ten times more crowded than Pat's, which explained Donovan's bewilderment at repeatedly cannoning into chairs and tables. There was a large round table in the center of the room covered with a baize cloth, and there was an aspidistra in the window. It was, in fact, the kind of room whose owner, the young men felt sure, would be difficult to explain to. With silent horror they gazed down at the table, on which lay a little pile of letters.

"Mrs. Ernestine Grant," breathed Donovan, picking them up and reading the name. "Oh, help. Do you think she's heard us?"

"It's a miracle she hasn't heard *you*," said Jimmy. "What with your language and the way you've been crashing into the furniture. Come on, let's get out of here!"

They hastily switched off the light and retraced their steps on tiptoe to the lift. Jimmy breathed a sigh of relief as they regained the fastness of its depths without further incident.

"I do like a woman to be a good sound sleeper," he said approvingly. "Mrs. Ernestine Grant has her points."

"I see it now," said Donovan; "why we made the mistake in the floor, I mean. Out in that well we started up from the basement." He heaved on the rope, and the lift shot up.

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"We're right this time."

"I devoutly trust we are," said Jimmy, as he stepped out into another inky void. "My nerves won't stand many more shocks of this kind."

But no further nerve strain was imposed. The first click of the light showed them Pat's kitchen, and in another minute they were opening the front door and admitting the two girls who were waiting outside.

"You have been a long time," grumbled Pat. "Mildred and I have been waiting here ages."

"We've had an adventure," said Donovan. "We might have been hauled off to the police station as dangerous malefactors."

Pat had passed on into the sitting room, where she switched on the light and dropped her wrap on the sofa. She listened with lively interest to Donovan's account of his adventures.

"I'm glad she didn't catch you," she commented. "I'm sure she's an old curmudgeon. I got a note from her this morning—wanted to see me sometime—something she had to complain about—my piano, I suppose. People who don't like pianos over their heads shouldn't come to live in flats. I say, Donovan, you've hurt your hand. It's all over blood. Go and wash it under the tap."

Donovan looked down at his hand in surprise. He went out of the room obediently and presently his voice called to Jimmy.

"Hullo," said the other, "what's up? You haven't hurt yourself badly, have you?"

"I haven't hurt myself at all."

There was something so queer in Donovan's voice that Jimmy stared at him in surprise. Donovan held out his washed hand and Jimmy saw that there was no cut of any kind on it.

"That's odd," he said, frowning. "There was quite a lot of blood. Where did it come from?"

And then, suddenly, he realized what his quicker-witted friend had already seen.

"By Jove," Donovan said. *"It must have come from that flat."*

He stopped, thinking over the possibilities his words implied.

"You're sure it was—er—blood?" Jimmy said. "Not paint?"

Donovan shook his head.

"It was blood, all right," he said, and shivered.

They looked at each other. The same thought was clearly in each of their minds. It was Jimmy who voiced it first.

"I say," he said awkwardly. "Do you think we ought to—well—go down again—and have—a—a look around? See

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it's all right, you know?"

"What about the girls?"

"We won't say anything to them. Pat's going to put on an apron and make us an omelet. We'll be back by the time they wonder where we are."

"Oh, well, come on," said Donovan. "I suppose we've got to go through with it. I daresay there isn't anything really wrong."

But his tone lacked conviction. They got into the lift and descended to the floor below. They found their way across the kitchen without much difficulty and once more switched on the sitting-room light.

"It must have been in here," said Donovan, "that I got the stuff on me. I never touched anything in the kitchen."

He looked round him, Jimmy did the same, and they both frowned. Everything appeared neat and commonplace and miles removed from any suggestion of violence or blood.

Suddenly Jimmy started violently and caught his companion's arm.

"Look!"

Donovan followed the pointing finger and in his turn uttered an exclamation. From beneath the heavy rep curtains there protruded a foot—a woman's foot in a patent-leather shoe.

Jimmy went to the curtains and drew them apart. In the recess of the window a woman's huddled body lay on the floor, a sticky dark pool beside it. She was dead, there was no doubt of that. Jimmy was attempting to raise her when Donovan stopped him.

"You'd better not do that. She oughtn't to be touched till the police come."

"The police. Oh, of course. I say, Donovan, what a ghastly business. Who do you think she is? Mrs. Ernestine Grant?"

"Looks like it. At any rate, if there's anyone else in the flat they're keeping jolly quiet."

"What do we do next?" asked Jimmy. "Run out and get a policeman or ring up from Pat's flat?"

"I should think ringing up would be best. Come on, we might as well go out the front door. We can't spend the whole night going up and down in that evil-smelling lift."

Jimmy agreed. Just as they were passing through the door he hesitated.

"Look here, do you think one of us ought to stay—just to keep an eye on things—till the police come?"

'Yes, I think you're right. If you'll stay I'll run up and telephone."

He ran quickly up the stairs and rang the bell of the flat

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above. Pat came to open it, a very pretty Pat with a flushed face and a cooking apron on. Her eyes widened in surprise.

"You? But how—Donovan, what is it? Is anything the matter?"

He took both her hands in his.

"It's all right, Pat—only we've made rather an unpleasant discovery in the flat below. A woman—dead."

"Oh!" She gave a little gasp. "How horrible. Has she had a fit or something?"

"No. It looks—well—it looks rather as though she had been murdered."

"Oh, Donovan."

"I know. It's pretty beastly."

Her hands were still in his. She had left them there, was even clinging to him. Darling Pat, how he loved her. Did she care at all for him? Sometimes he thought she did. Sometimes he was afraid that Jimmy Faulkener—remembrance of Jimmy waiting patiently below made him start guiltily.

"Pat, dear, we must telephone the police."

"Monsieur is right," said a voice behind him. "And in the meantime, while we are waiting their arrival, perhaps I can be of some slight assistance."

They had been standing in the doorway of the flat, and now they peered out to the landing. A figure was standing on the stairs a little way above them. It moved down and into their range of vision.

They stood staring at a little man with very fierce mustaches and an egg-shaped head. He wore a resplendent dressing gown and embroidered slippers. He bowed gallantly to Patricia.

"Mademoiselle," he said. "I am, as perhaps you know, the tenant of the flat above. I like to be up high—the air, the view over London. I take the flat in the name of Mr. O'Connor. But I am not an Irishman. I have another name. That is why I venture to put myself at your service. Permit me."

With a flourish he pulled out a card and handed it to Pat. She read it.

"M. Hercule Poirot. Oh!" She caught her breath. "*The* M. Poirot? The great detective? And you will really help?"

"That is my intention, Mademoiselle. I nearly offered my help earlier in the evening."

Pat looked puzzled.

"I heard you discussing how to gain admission to your flat. Me, I am very clever at picking locks. I could without doubt have opened your door for you, but I hesitated to suggest it. You might have had the grave suspicions of me."

Pat laughed.

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"Now, Monsieur," said Poirot to Donovan. "Go in, I pray of you, and telephone to the police. I will descend to the flat below."

Pat came down the stairs with him. They found Jimmy on guard and Pat explained Poirot's presence. Jimmy, in his turn, related his and Donovan's adventures. The detective listened attentively.

"The lift door was unbolted, you say? You emerged into the kitchen, but the light it would not turn on."

He directed his footsteps to the kitchen as he spoke. His fingers touched the switch.

"Tiens! Voilà ce qui est curieux!" he said as the light flashed on. "It functions perfectly now. I wonder—"

He held up a finger to insure silence and listened A faint sound broke the stillness—the sound of an unmistakable snore.

"Ah!" said Poirot. *"La chambre de domestique."*

He tiptoed across the kitchen into a little pantry, out of which led a door. He opened the door and switched on the light. The room was the kind of dog kennel designed by the builders of flats to accommodate a human being. The floor space was almost entirely occupied by the bed. In the bed was a rosy-cheeked girl lying on her back with her mouth wide open, snoring placidly.

Poirot switched off the light and beat a retreat.

"She will not wake," he said. "We will let her sleep till the police come."

He went back to the sitting room. Donovan had joined them.

"The police will be here almost immediately, they say," he said breathlessly. "We are to touch nothing."

Poirot nodded.

"We will not touch," he said. "We will look, that is all."

He moved into the room. Mildred had come down with Donovan, and all four young people stood in the doorway and watched him with breathless interest.

"What I can't understand, sir, is this," said Donovan. "I never went near the window—how did the blood come on my hand?"

"My young friend, the answer to that stares you in the face. Of what color is the tablecloth? Red, is it not? And doubtless you did put your hand on the table."

"Yes, I did. Is that—" He stopped.

Poirot nodded. He was bending over the table. He indicated with his hand a dark patch on the red.

"It was here that the crime

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was committed," he said solemnly. "The body was moved afterwards."

Then he stood upright and looked slowly round the room. He did not move, he handled nothing, but nevertheless the four watching felt as though every object in that rather frowsty place gave up its secret to his observant eye.

Hercule Poirot nodded his head as though satisfied. A little sigh escaped him.

"I see," he said.

"You see what?" asked Donovan curiously.

"I see," said Poirot, "what you doubtless *felt*—that the room is overfull of furniture."

Donovan smiled ruefully.

"I did go barging about a bit," he confessed. "Of course, everything was in a different place to Pat's room, and I couldn't make it out."

"Not everything," said Poirot.

Donovan looked at him inquiringly.

"I mean," said Poirot apologetically, "that certain things are always fixed. In a block of flats the door, the window, the fireplace—they are usually in the same place in the rooms which are below each other."

"Isn't that rather splitting hairs?" asked Mildred. She was looking at Poirot with faint disapproval.

"One should always speak with absolute accuracy. That is a little—how do you say?—fad of mine."

There was the noise of footsteps on the stairs, and three men came in. They were a police inspector, a constable, and the divisional surgeon. The Inspector recognized Poirot and greeted him in an almost reverential manner. Then he turned to the others.

"I shall want statements from everyone," he began, "but in the first place—"

Poirot interrupted.

"A little suggestion. We will go back to the flat upstairs and Mademoiselle here shall do what she was planning to do—make us an omelet. Me, I have a passion for the omelets. Then, M. l'Inspecteur, when you have finished here, you will mount to us and ask questions at your leisure."

It was arranged accordingly, and Poirot went up with them.

"M. Poirot," said Pat, "I think you're a perfect dear. And you shall have a lovely omelet. I really make omelets frightfully well."

"That is good. Once, Mademoiselle, I loved a beautiful young English girl who resembled you greatly—but alas, she could not cook. So perhaps everything was for the best."

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There was a faint sadness in his voice, and Jimmy Faulkener looked at him curiously.

Once in the flat, however, he exerted himself to please and amuse. The grim tragedy below was almost forgotten.

The omelet had been consumed and duly praised by the time Inspector Rice's footsteps were heard. He came in accompanied by the doctor, having left the constable below.

"Well, Monsieur Poirot," he said. "It all seems clear and aboveboard—not much in your line, though we may find it hard to catch the man. I'd just like to hear how the discovery came to be made."

Donovan and Jimmy between them recounted the happenings of the evening. The Inspector turned reproachfully to Pat.

"You shouldn't leave your lift door unbolted, Miss. You really shouldn't."

"I shan't again," said Pat, with a shiver. "Somebody might come in and murder me like that poor woman below."

"Ah, but they didn't come in that way," said the Inspector.

"You will recount to us what you have discovered, yes?" said Poirot.

"I don't know as I ought to—but seeing it's you . . ."

"Précisément," said Poirot. "And these young people—they will be discreet."

"The newspapers will get hold of it, anyway, soon enough," said the Inspector. "There's no real secret about the matter. Well, the dead woman's Mrs. Grant, all right. I had the porter up to identify her. Woman of about thirty-five. She was sitting at the table, and she was shot with an automatic pistol of small caliber, probably by someone sitting opposite her at table. She fell forward, and that's how the bloodstain came on the table."

"But wouldn't someone have heard the shot?" asked Mildred.

"The pistol was fitted with a silencer. No, you wouldn't hear anything. By the way, did you hear the screech the maid let out when we told her her mistress was dead? No. Well, that just shows how unlikely it was that anyone would hear the shot."

"Has the maid no story to tell?" asked Poirot.

"It was her evening out. She's got her own key. She came in about ten o'clock. Everything was quiet. She thought her mistress had gone to bed."

"She did not look in the sitting room, then?"

"Yes, she took the letters in there which had come by the evening post, but she saw nothing unusual—any more than Mr. Faulkener and Mr.

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Bailey did. You see, the murderer had concealed the body rather neatly behind the curtains."

"But it was a curious thing to do, don't you think?"

Poirot's voice was very gentle, yet it held something that made the Inspector look up quickly.

"Didn't want the crime discovered till he'd had time to make his getaway."

"Perhaps—perhaps—but continue with what you were saying."

"The maid went out at five o'clock. The doctor here puts the time of death as, roughly, about four to five hours ago. That's right, isn't it?"

The doctor, who was a man of few words, contented himself with jerking his head affirmatively.

"It's a quarter to twelve now. The actual time can, I think, be narrowed down to a fairly definite hour."

He took out a crumpled sheet of paper.

"We found this in the pocket of the dead woman's dress. You needn't be afraid of handling it. There are no fingerprints on it."

Poirot smoothed out the sheet. Across it some words were printed in small prim capitals.

"I WILL COME TO SEE YOU THIS EVENING AT HALF-PAST SEVEN.—J.F."

"A compromising document to leave behind," commented Poirot, as he handed it back.

"Well, he didn't know she had it in her pocket," said the Inspector. "He probably thought she'd destroyed it. We've evidence that he *was* a careful man, though. The pistol she was shot with we found under the body—and there again no fingerprints. They'd been wiped off very carefully with a silk handkerchief."

"How do you know," said Poirot, "that it was a *silk* handkerchief?"

"Because we found it," said the Inspector triumphantly. "At the last, as he was drawing the curtains, he must have let it drop unnoticed."

He handed across a big white silk handkerchief—a good quality handkerchief. It did not need the Inspector's finger to draw Poirot's attention to the mark on it in the center. It was quite legible. Poirot read the name out.

"John Fraser."

"That's it," said the Inspector. "John Fraser—J.F. in the note. We know the name of the man we have to look for, and I daresay when we find out a little about the dead woman, and her relations come forward, we shall get a line on him."

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"I wonder," said Poirot. "No, *mon cher*, somehow I do not think he will be easy to find, your John Fraser. He is a strange man—careful, since he marks his handkerchiefs and wipes the pistol with which he has committed the crime—yet careless since he loses his handkerchief and does not search for a letter that might incriminate him."

"Flurried, that's what he was," said the Inspector.

"It is possible," said Poirot. "Yes, it is possible. And he was not seen entering the building?"

"There are all sorts of people going in and out—these are big blocks. I suppose none of you"—he addressed the four collectively—"saw anyone coming out of the flat?"

Pat shook her head.

"We went out earlier—about seven o'clock."

"I see." The Inspector rose. Poirot accompanied him to the door.

"As a little favor, may I examine the flat below?"

"Why, certainly, M. Poirot. I know what they think of you at headquarters. I'll leave you a key. I've got two. It will be empty. The maid cleared out to some relatives, too scared to stay there alone."

"I thank you," said M. Poirot. He went back into the flat, a thoughtful expression on his face.

"You're not satisfied, M. Poirot?" said Jimmy.

"No," said Poirot. "I am not satisfied."

Donovan looked at him curiously. "What worries you?"

Poirot did not answer. He remained silent for a minute, frowning, then he made a sudden impatient movement of shoulders.

"I will say good night to you, Mademoiselle. You must be tired. You have had much cooking to do, eh?"

Pat laughed.

"Only the omelet. I didn't do dinner. Donovan and Jimmy called for us, and we went out to a little place in Soho."

"And then, without doubt, you went to a theater?"

"Yes. 'The Brown Eyes of Caroline.'"

"Ah!" said Poirot. "It should have been blue eyes—the blue eyes of Mademoiselle."

He made a sentimental gesture, then once more wished Pat good night, also Mildred, who was staying over by special request, as Pat admitted frankly that she would get the horrors if left alone on this particular night.

The two young men accompanied Poirot. When the door was shut and they were preparing to say goodbye to

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him on the landing, Poirot forestalled them.

"My young friends, you heard me say that I was not satisfied? *Eh bien*, it is true—I am not. I go now to make some little investigations of my own. You would like to accompany me—yes?"

An eager assent greeted this proposal. Poirot led the way to the flat below and inserted the key the Inspector had given him in the lock. On entering he did not, as the others had expected, go into the sitting room. Instead he went straight to the kitchen. In a little recess which served as a scullery a big iron bin was standing. Poirot uncovered this, and, doubling himself up, began to root in it with the energy of a ferocious terrier.

Both Jimmy and Donovan stared at him in amazement.

Suddenly with a cry of triumph he emerged. In his hand he held aloft a small stoppered bottle.

"*Voilà!*" he said. "I find what I seek."

He sniffed at it delicately.

"Alas! I am *enrhumé*—I have the cold in the head."

Donovan took the bottle from him and sniffed in his turn, but could smell nothing. He took out the stopper and held the bottle to his nose before Poirot's warning cry could stop him.

Immediately he fell like a log. Poirot, by springing forward, partly broke his fall.

"Imbecile!" he cried. "The idea. To remove the stopper in that foolhardy manner! Did he not observe how delicately I handled it? Monsieur —Faulkener—is it not? Will you be so good as to get me a little brandy? I observed a decanter in the sitting room."

Jimmy hurried off, but by the time he returned, Donovan was sitting up and declaring himself quite all right again. He had to listen to a short lecture from Poirot on the necessity of caution in sniffing at possibly poisonous substances.

"I think I'll be off home," said Donovan, rising shakily to his feet. "That is, if I can't be any more use here. I feel a bit wonky still."

"Assuredly," said Poirot. "That is the best thing you can do. M. Faulkener, attend me here a little minute. I will return on the instant."

He accompanied Donovan to the door and beyond. They remained outside on the landing talking for some minutes. When Poirot at last re-entered the flat he found Jimmy standing in the sitting room gazing round him with puzzled eyes.

"Well, M. Poirot," he said, "what next?"

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"There is nothing next. The case is finished."

"What?"

"I know everything—now."

Jimmy stared at him.

"That little bottle you found?"

"Exactly. That little bottle."

Jimmy shook his head.

"I can't make head or tail of it. For some reason or other I can see you are dissatisfied with the evidence against this John Fraser, whoever he may be."

"*Whoever he may be,*" repeated Poirot softly. "If he is anyone at all—well, I shall be surprised."

"I don't understand."

"He is a name—that is all—a name carefully marked on a handkerchief!"

"And the letter?"

"Did you notice that it was printed? Now why? I will tell you. Handwriting might be recognized, and a typewritten letter is more easily traced than you would imagine—but if a *real* John Fraser wrote that letter those two points would not have appealed to him! No, it was written on purpose and put in the dead woman's pocket for us to find. There is no such person as John Fraser."

Jimmy looked at him inquiringly.

"And so," went on Poirot, "I went back to the point that first struck me. You heard me say that certain things in a room were always in the same place under given circumstances. I gave three instances. I might have mentioned a fourth—*the electric-light switch, my friend.*"

Jimmy still stared uncomprehendingly. Poirot went on.

"Your friend Donovan did not go near the window—it was by resting his hand on this table that he got it covered in blood. But I asked myself—*why did he rest it there?* What was he doing groping about this room in darkness? For remember, my friend, *the electric-light switch is always in the same place–by the door.* Why, when he came to this room, did he not at once feel for the switch and turn it on? That was the natural, the normal thing to do. According to him, he tried to turn on the light in the kitchen, but failed. Yet when I tried the switch it was in perfect working order.

"Did he, then, not wish the light to go on just then? If it had gone on you would both have seen at once that you were in the wrong flat. There would have been no reason to come into this room."

"What are you driving at, M. Poirot? I don't understand. What do you mean?"

"I mean—this."

Poirot held up a door key.

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"The key to this flat?"

"No, *mon ami*, the key of the flat above. Mademoiselle Patricia's key, which M. Donovan Bailey abstracted from her bag sometime during the evening."

"But why—why?"

"*Parbleu!* So that he could do what he wanted to do—gain admission to this flat in a perfectly unsuspicious manner. He made sure that the lift door was unbolted earlier in the evening."

"Where did you get the key?"

Poirot's smile broadened.

"I found it just now—where I looked for it—in M. Donovan's pocket. See you, that little bottle I pretended to find was a ruse. M. Donovan is taken in. He does what I knew he would do—unstoppers it and sniffs. And in that little bottle is Ethyl Chloride, a very powerful instant anesthetic. It gives me just the moment or two of unconsciousness I need. I take from his pocket the two things that I knew would be there. This key was one of them—The other—"

He stopped and then went on, "I questioned at the time the reason the Inspector gave for the body being concealed behind the curtain. To gain time? No, there was more than that. And so I thought of just one thing—*the post*, my friend. The evening post that comes at half-past nine or thereabouts. Say the murderer does not find something he expects to find, but that something may be delivered by post later. Clearly, then, he must come back. But the crime must not be discovered by the maid when she comes in, or the police would take possession of the flat, so he hides the body behind the curtain. And the maid, suspecting nothing, lays the letters on the table as usual."

"The letters?"

"Yes, the letters." Poirot drew something from his pocket.

"This is the second article I took from M. Donovan when he was unconscious." He showed a typewritten envelope addressed to Mrs. Ernestine Grant. "But I will ask you one thing first, M. Faulkener, before we look at the contents of this letter. Are you or are you not in love with Mademoiselle Patricia?"

"I care for Pat—but I've never thought I had a chance."

"You thought that she cared for M. Donovan? It may be that she had begun to care for him—but it was only a beginning, my friend. It is for you to make her forget—to stand by her in her trouble."

"Trouble?" said Jimmy.

"Yes, trouble. We will do all

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we can to keep her name out of it, but it will be impossible to do so entirely. She was, you see, the motive."

He ripped open the envelope that he held. An enclosure fell out. The covering letter was brief, and was from a firm of solicitors.

DEAR MADAM,

The document you enclose is quite in order, and the fact of the marriage having taken place in a foreign country does not invalidate it in any way.

Yours truly, etc.

Poirot spread out the enclosure. It was a certificate of marriage between Donovan Bailey and Ernestine Grant, dated eight years before.

"Oh, my God!" said Jimmy. "Pat said she'd had a letter from the woman asking to see her, but she never dreamed it was anything important."

Poirot nodded.

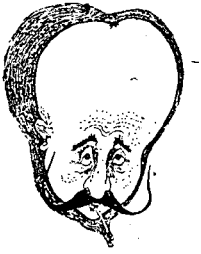
"M. Donovan knew. He went to see his wife this evening before going to the flat above—a strange irony, by the way, that led the unfortunate woman to come to this building where her rival lived. He murdered her in cold blood—and then went on to his evening's amusement. His wife must have told him that she had sent the marriage certificate to her solicitors, and was expecting to hear from them. Doubtless he himself had tried to make her believe that there was a flaw in the marriage."

"He seemed in quite good spirits, too, all evening. M. Poirot, you haven't let him escape?" Jimmy shuddered.

"There is no escape for him," said Poirot gravely. "You need not fear."

"It's Pat I'm thinking about mostly," said Jimmy. "You don't think—she really cared."

"That is your part," said Poirot gently. "To make her turn to you and forget. I do not think you will find it very difficult, *mon ami*."



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a *NEW* short story by

JOE GORES

Something different from Joe Gores, and "clear and convincing" proof of his writing versatility . . . an adventure-crime story about mountain climbing in East Africa, with as authentic and chilling a background as you have ever read . . . You won't forget Kendrick's heroics for a long time . . .

KIRINYAGA

by JOE GORES

The climber looked like a fly at this distance, Kendrick thought. Because of the anorack he wore, like a bright red fly. Clinging to a rock face of vertical slabs and deep horizontal sections which together formed a massive staircase with hundred-foot risers.

The fly had reached the top of a trough-like diedre in one of the risers. Broken rock there. Brought up closer, the fly began working toward a niche in the edge of the step above. Not a bad show for a man recovering from his annual bout of malaria, Kendrick thought.

Closer yet. He could see the three-color zigzag design of the knitted balaclava helmet. Hesitating at the foot of a bulging rock face split by a shallow groove. Get on with it, Kendrick thought. Right up through the bloody overhang to the stance above. You know you have to do it.

Good show. Tight on the head and torso now. Fingers groping above for purchase. It was coming now. Head turning so that sunlight struck off smoked goggles. Unshaven, teeth clenched, sweat rivuleting the cheek and line of jaw even in the subfreezing temperatures of 17,000 feet. Now. Just here.

The climber slipped, swung free of the rock, only the fingers of the right hand still holding their grip. A gasp went up. Kendrick grinned. Yes. A good bit, that. Unexpected.

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The image disappeared and the lights of the stuffy crowded viewing room came up to the clearing of throats and muttered comments. Kendrick paused in the hallway, sweat starting to dry on his lean muscular body, made leaner by recent illness. A couple of inches under six feet, with straight, prematurely white hair and a deeply tanned mid-thirties face.

Morna tucked a proprietary arm through his as the production people and distributors' reps and studio flacks flowed around them.

"Don't you think it's wonderful footage?" Her clear, very blue eyes smiled up into his. Morna was his ex-wife. "Aren't you glad I got you on as guide and Kenya technical adviser?"

"I can use the money," Kendrick agreed. He said, "You look wonderful yourself, luv. London must agree with you."

He still had her note from two years before, when she had packed it in. *This bloody damn country . . .* He had found it when he'd returned from a fortnight on staff at the Outward Bound Wilderness School on Kilimanjaro. Hadn't been strong enough to hold her.

"You look awful," she said. "Thin and—"

"The annual bout of malaria. It's finished now."

She tugged at his arm, skin like satin and untouched by the sun, auburn hair worn long and straight and parted in the middle like an Asian's. "Let me buy you a drink. I'm meeting Burke at The Thorn Tree."

Let her buy, Kendrick thought. She'd have plenty of pence now, living with the great Burke Hamlin. He felt a stab of jealousy.

They went out into bright Kenya sunshine, then under the colorful umbrellas shading The Thorn Tree's sidewalk tables. Hamlin was already there, surrounded by the usual sycophants, newspaper and media people; three tables had been pulled together to accommodate them. Perkins, the young reporter on the *East African Standard*, was asking a question. Kendrick knew Perkins from the Kenya Mountain Club.

"How *did* you get that superb climbing footage? I've been on scrambles up Kenya myself, and that camera angle—"

"Two cameras, both set up on the edge of that glacier on Point Lenana." Art Kaye, the hulking bespectacled chief cameraman, had taken it as a technical question on the difficulties of location shooting over three miles above sea level where cameras would want to freeze up. "What you saw was put together out of both

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magazines. Aeroflex 35mm's, one with a 120mm zoom for the loose stuff, the other with a Questar for in tight."

A woman reporter put the focus back on Hamlin. Morna had sat down next to the actor and had an unconsciously familiar hand on his thigh with Kendrick's drink forgotten.

"Mr. Hamlin, when you slipped and were hanging by only one hand—was that deliberate? Or—"

Burke Hamlin leaned back in his chair and sipped thoughtfully at his drink, a faraway look in his pale blue eyes. A grin split his craggy features. He had a rolling masculine voice that went well with the six-three physique and fifty-inch chest.

"Let's just say it makes damned good theater."

Kendrick used that as an exit line, sliding backward out of the crowd as Morna's lips formed the words: *Call me.* Behind him, Hamlin's voice, beautifully projected, was explaining that Kenya was a corruption of a much older Kikuyu word, Kirinyaga—which meant, literally, mountain of whiteness. The house of god, home of Ngai, the creator.

Kendrick had told him that himself, a few days before.

Over their first drink Morna said, "A few days in Nairobi and I remember why I left East Africa."

"Thanks for them few kind words, ma'am."

Kendrick had felt a suppressed masculine excitement ever since picking her up at the hotel. They'd been good together, and he'd found single-life sex unexpectedly conventional and bland, like British cooking. Morna laughed and laid a warm hand on his.

"Present company excepted. You don't much care for Burke, do you?"

"Should I?"

"Beyond the machismo bit, I mean. After all, isn't he the sort you've always professed to admire? A real man who can come out here to your world and excel—"

It slipped out drily before he realized it. "You mean like he did in that climbing footage?"

"Exactly." She pushed aside the ruins of her steak. God, she was beautiful, face alight, eyes sparkling, perfect lips curved. Small wonder he'd not been man enough to hold her. She said, "Catch-up time."

Not much to tell. White hunting, what was left of it, had become a black man's game by government fiat, so he'd drifted into the Kenya Game Department as a park warden. And spent his spare time climbing,

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of course—Kili, Kenya, the Aberdares, the Ruwenzoris.

"The Mountains of the Moon!" he exclaimed. "Took us three weeks to get in and up to the top of Rarasibi, and it rained every bloody day. Except near the top, where it snowed."

"I'll take Carnaby Street."

She had literally, in fact, returning to the mannequin's job from which Kendrick's whirlwind courtship during a long leave in England had snatched her. It was in Carnaby Street that Burke Hamlin also had found her, modeling a wardrobe for his latest dolly who'd quickly become ex-dolly.

"It's permanent with you and Burke?"

"I leave decisions to him, he's superb at them." The hotel elevator bore them upward. "I enjoy the sex-object role."

Sex-object for Hamlin, thought Kendrick a bit bitterly over the brandies in her room. If he'd been a stronger man, more self-confident like bloody Hamlin, she'd still be his. Then she surprised him with that special look he'd never been able to forget, was kicking off her shoes and unzipping her dress with one flow of sensuous movement. Her eyes were enormous and dark and unfocused in the dim room.

"Just between us, darling," she said. "Old times."

It was better than old times. It was better than anything else would ever be, Kendrick thought as he dressed by the soft glow from the open bathroom door. She was lying on the bed, watching him with solemn, sated eyes.

"I'd forgot," she said, "just how—" She stopped. "Burke will be busy again on Thursday night."

To his own surprise Kendrick said, "I'll be back up on Kenya by then." It came out rougher than he wanted. But if he remained in Nairobi he wouldn't be able to stay away from her, and he didn't want that. She was another man's woman now.

"You just came down off that bloody mountain," she said curtly.

There wasn't any answer to that. He kissed her and let himself out. He was glad he hadn't told her the truth about that climbing footage of Hamlin. Hamlin was right for Morna, the strong, aggressive individual she'd always wanted and hadn't found in Kendrick.

By the time he reached the summit of Point Lenana, only an hour up the ridge from Top Hut, it was snowing again and the two major peaks, Nelion and Batian, had been blotted out. It was just a scramble, nothing more strenuous than

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kicking steps in each day's new snow. He'd been up to Lenana each morning for the past three days, waiting for a window of decent climbing weather to try the twin central peaks.

Going down, the snow-blanketed breadth of the Lewis Glacier lay to his right, the clouds now pouring up over it and across the ridge like smoke off dry ice. It was snowing in earnest when he swung open the door of Top Hut, itself at 15,730 feet, and stomped his feet clean. Only then did he realize two more climbers had arrived.

"We wondered where you'd got to, with all your climbing gear still here," said Perkins. The reporter from the *Standard* was a slightly built youth, pale-skinned and pale-haired and, right now, looking white and drawn around the mouth. The other climber was Burke Hamlin.

"A scramble up Lenana." Kendrick stripped off outer clothing. "Touch of mountain sickness?"

Burke Hamlin made a grandly dismissive gesture. He looked immense in his climbing clothes. "Not me. Young Perkins."

"You want some aspirin or Panadol for the head?"

"Some of the Panadol, if I may," said Perkins.

Kendrick watched him down the pills with water and fought a rising anger. What the hell were these two doing up here? Perkins, easy of course: hero-worship of Hamlin, and a possible feature in one of the big London dailies. But why Hamlin? A talkative bellhop at the hotel?

"Want to check the peaks," grunted Kendrick.

He left the hut without looking back, knowing the actor would follow. Bloody fools. Hamlin, even Perkins, had never seen Kirinyaga frown. Now, with the wet season pushing the snow line down, that frown could be deadly to climbers. He turned when he heard Hamlin's boots crunching behind him.

"Neither of you is a good enough climber for any real rock-work."

Hamlin gave him that wide and famous grin that celluloid villains saw just before the choreographed mayhem began. "Maybe I want to revise that estimate for you. Or maybe I want to say I don't mind your sleeping with my woman, but why did you tell her the truth about that climbing footage?"

Morna herself must have told Hamlin of their brief coupling. Why?

"I didn't know there was any bloody great secret about that

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footage, Hamlin. But for what it's worth, I didn't tell her."

"She says you did."

He shrugged. "Maybe Kaye mentioned it. I didn't have to."

In a surprisingly mild voice Hamlin said, "You're rather a louse, aren't you?"

"Listen, Hamlin, any fears you might have that I'll get Morna away from you are purely make-believe. Just for the effect. But this mountain is real. Take the boy back down tomorrow. His sickness gives you a good excuse."

"While you stay up here? Mighty mountaineer turning back the lowly actor because the mountain is too dangerous for him? No, thank you."

"For Pete's sake," said Kendrick in a pained voice.

He went back inside. Perkins was lying on one of the bunks with a forearm over his eyes. Kendrick knew the symptoms of oxygen starvation vividly himself—headache, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting. But he also knew Perkins, hero-worshipping all the way, would struggle up the peaks if Hamlin did—unless he could deflect the youngster himself. Hamlin couldn't very well try it alone.

"That film you saw of Hamlin climbing," he told Perkins. "That was me. Hamlin's no better climber than you are, doesn't know a damned thing about any really tricky rock or ice-work. Standard III, maybe. You'll be facing Standard V pitches up there, and ice and snow."

Perkins sat up, swung his feet to the floor. He said, hesitantly, "You're saying we'd be fools to go on?"

"Bloody fools. Rest here the night and head down in the morning. Will you do that?"

Perkins finally nodded. He looked very ill. Kendrick stood up.

"I'll spend the night at Two-Tarn Hut," he said. "Neither Hamlin nor I would be comfortable if I dossed here."

He settled into the shabby wooden hut that crouched near the bleak shore of Hut Tarn well before dark. He found himself fighting a vague uneasiness. He finally isolated it: Hamlin wouldn't be fool enough to try for the peaks alone, would he?

Golden sunlight slanted through the window to wake him. It was late, nearly 6:00 A.M. Kendrick yawned, sat up, began pulling on layers of clothing. The hut was icy. When he opened the door, the dazzling white and black peaks towered starkly above, surely close enough to touch across the miles of snow and icefields flanking the glaciers.

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Kendrick hurriedly lighted the primus and set water heating in the sufuria. Amazing to get a window of weather this far into the season, he ought to make the most of it. He poured boiling water over the tea leaves, sugar, and dried milk in his cup, and to the remainder in the sufuria added white corn meal, dried milk, and salt to make *ugali*. Porter's rations, that, not European fare; but he could subsist on ten pounds of food a week up here.

He ate at the window. As he had thought. Already wisps of cloud were forming in the cleavage between Nelion and Batian, where the Diamond glacier sparkled. The cloud falling on the ice made it gray and cold-looking. Kirinyaga's usual rainy season tricks. Sunshine, then—

Kendrick's spare hard body tensed. He never would have seen them if the window hadn't framed them, given them scale.

Bloody stupid idiots! He glassed the distant figures with his binoculars. Hamlin in the lead, Perkins behind, trying the southwest ridge of Batian. He should have known Perkins' acquiescence had been the mountain sickness working. When that had lessened, and with Hamlin whispering in his bloody ear—

"The blind leading the blind," Kendrick said in a vicious voice.

The southwest ridge. A tough ascent even during the climbing season. On the south side a snowfield, where they'd have to cut steps across. At the head of that, a rock bulge that would be treacherously verglassed this time of the year.

He jerked on sweaters, anorak, knitted mitts with split palms, stuffed balaclava and waterproof gauntlets into pockets, jammed a soft floppy-brimmed army fatigue hat on his head.

To the snout of the Darwin glacier he moved at a slow trot, then angled up the true right bank of the ice floe, reversed himself, went left up snow-sheathed rocks to the southwest ridge notch. He followed their tracks across the snowfield, his cheeks burning with cold. The sun had gone, the wind was moaning at him from the east. He paused to don the balaclava, saving the gauntlets for the real cold ahead. He had always hated heroics, and now he was involved in those of a posturing ape.

They had somehow made it up and over the rock bulge, verglassed as it was with frozen rain. He felt a spurt of adrenalin-like hope; that had taken nerve and strength. But ahead, between him and the

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main ridge, lay a hundred yards of steep black broken rock. And beyond that—

A sudden shrill scream cut through the wind's low moan. He needed no clatter of falling rock to confirm it; he'd heard men fall before. He went up the hundred yards of tumbled rock in a single ferocious sustained rush that left him on the narrow ridge panting and nauseated. The screams had cut off. Dead? In shock? One or both?

He hallooed. No answer. He was aware of intense cold stinging his nostrils and lungs. Of thin air pushing his pulse to 160. And of fatigue. Bone-chilling fatigue. The annual fever bout was not as far behind as he had thought.

Kendrick hallooed again. This time a weak voice answered.

They'd come to grief at the crux of the climb, a two-hundred foot buttress of exposed rock dismally bare of good handholds. His eyes searched the swirling, snow-laden clouds above. There! A dark shape clinging to the sheer wall.

One dark shape.

"Are you all right?" he called.

"Help! For God's sake, help!"

The rock bulged out toward Batian's west face, so his weight was carried by his arms and the strain of thighs and knees against the rock. Up. and up. The face mercifully eased to merely vertical. Thirty feet. Forty. Burke Hamlin was clinging spreadeagled to good holds; face white and strained, eyes absolutely wild.

"Get me down from here," he said hoarsely.

Kendrick was well to the side. Terrified climbers were like terrified swimmers, they'd take anything within reach down with them.

"Are you hurt?"

"I—don't know. For God's sake, man—"

Kendrick's fingers were numbing with cold; he regretted the gauntlets. Snow swirled around them. The actor's safety rope had parted a couple of feet below his belt. Kendrick had to find Perkins, but before he could he had to get Hamlin down the ledge formed by the ridgetop and the base of this exposed buttress.

"Move when I tell you, where I tell you," he said in the voice of someone calming a spooked horse. "Don't look down. Okay, left hand down six inches . . . good! Now, left foot . . ."

It was a bad twenty minutes. Hamlin collapsed on the four-foot width of the ridgeline. Kendrick followed the ledge, found the safety line with Perkins still attached to it. Had

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been probably twenty feet below Hamlin when he'd fallen and the rope had parted, had struck the ridge and had kept going over and down the sheer face.

Kendrick crouched on the ledge. Visibility was so bad he could barely see the blond youngster's limp body hooked around a knob of rock fifteen feet below. Three feet to either side, Kendrick thought, and he'd still be bouncing.

He belayed around an outcropping, then roped down to assess the damage. One leg was shattered just below the hip, so the jagged white end of femur was thrust out through a rip in the flannel trousers. The red meat exposed by the tear was already freezing. Internal, Kendrick could only guess. A pulse, yes, but—

The eyes suddenly opened in the deathly pale face a yard away.

"It's numb now."

"Anything broken inside that you know about?"

"My chest stabs when I breathe. I think it's ribs. I did two of them at rugger once and it feels the same." He closed his eyes, opened them. "I've had it, haven't I?"

Kendrick laid a momentary palm on his shoulder. "I'll get you up to the ledge."

He went up his rope hand over hand. On the ridge Hamlin was hunched in the lee of the buttress. He was shivering. There was a blue line around his mouth and the rim of his nostrils.

"He's fifteen feet below the ridgeline," said Kendrick. "I'm not sure I'm strong enough to get him up alone."

The wind moaned. Hamlin raised shock-dulled eyes. "He's still alive?"

"He won't be if we keep fooling around. We'll have to—"

He stopped there. Hamlin's mouth was set.

"I can't." His teeth had begun chattering. He was stripped of pretense. "Can't—face it. Can't—pull him up to the ledge, can't make it down—can't . . . arm broken."

Kendrick had seen men do remarkable things hampered by a broken arm. But he had also seen men like Hamlin before —stunned by the sudden terrible mortality that Kirinyaga could thrust upon you. Men who, faced with that realization, shriveled up inside. It was in search of that insight that others climbed.

He left Hamlin there and returned to Perkins. He braced, took a turn around his left hand, and began hauling. He was aware of Hamlin, watching him like a ferret; the actor's naked ego had begun peering

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once again from the rocks into which it had scuttled. The lift was the hardest thing Kendrick had ever done. When it was finished, he walked downwind from the crumpled youth and threw up.

"Lie down next to him, Hamlin. I've dragged him back under the face of the buttress where there's some shelter from the wind."

"Where are you going? You can't leave me here! You can't—"

"Grow up," said Kendrick.

The descent to Two-Tarn Hut wasn't too bad; the whining press of wind cut visibility with swirling snow, but gave him a fixed direction on which to depend. He gathered up his bedroll and blankets and started back up. He didn't like to contemplate the next hours. He was wearing down already; and besides the wind which in exposed places threatened to flick him off, his fatigue itself was dangerous. It made him treat tricky bits of rock-work with a numb, casual contempt.

The light was muddy as he dragged himself up the final yards to the narrow ridge. Anger stirred him.

"Dammit, Hamlin, I told you to lie down next to him."

"I—couldn't move."

"Move now or I'll kick your arm!"

Hamlin moved, crabwise, his back against the rock, his right arm hanging limply at his side. They got two of the blankets around Perkins and rolled him into the sleeping bag. A pulse of sorts, still breathing, but no outcry when they handled him. Just as well, Kendrick thought. At the very best he was going to lose his leg.

Hamlin snatched at the two remaining blankets.

"I'll need more than this, Kendrick! I'll freeze."

"You'll be all right. Keep moving around, work your fingers and toes. And make sure Perkins stays covered."

Kendrick entered a curious limbo of exhaustion where he moved solely by his superb mountaineer's sense. He had a flashlight, but here on the peaks it merely reflected back from swirling snow. During the rock-work he kept his mind awake with speculations of times and distances. Twenty-five miles to his VW down at the 9000-foot level, say. Easier going downhill, of course, but in the dark, in the snow and below that, rain . . .

He fell the first time going down the steep scree north of Shipton's Peak, twisting instinctively and landing on a shoulder rather than on his face in the loose, sliding vol-

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canic debris. By the time he reached the stream at the head of Teleki Valley he had fallen twice more. It was utterly black, pouring icy rain; he'd left his poncho at Two-Tarn Hut. At old ruined Klarwill's Hut he jettisoned ice axe, crampons, piton hammer, and ropes. He went on down the long hollow of moorland dotted with giant lobelia and euphorbia.

Below this was the vertical bog, several miles of coarse matted tussocks with water between. He lost track of his falls there. Only the vague starlight following the rain kept him floundering, splashing, cursing his way down.

Ahead, the dark mass of the treeline. He fell on it as on a banquet. Stunted, gnarled nidorellas bearded with moss. The Naru Moru forest track plunged down into the rainforest's impenetrable darkness. Sodden branches slapped at his face, clawed at his eyes. He used his flashlight here, made plenty of noise so he wouldn't surprise an elephant or leopard on the trail. Once the light limned great steaming piles of fresh buffalo dung.

At the Meteorological Clearing at 10,000 feet, he found Hamlin had left the keys in the Land Rover. That would cut 45 minutes and three miles afoot from his descent. He rested his forehead against the steering wheel as the four-wheel vehicle grumbled itself awake.

Midnight. Another day beginning. Good Lord, he'd never been so tired. And he still had to get back up again.

He sent the Land Rover careening down the narrow red murram track, almost sideswiped his VW, and as soon as he cleared the forest area swung off the route toward a distant farmhouse owned by a middle-aged Scots family originally from the Republic. His horn brought them awake so he could shamble through the welcome triangle of yellow lamplight, hollow-eyed and gaunt and caked with mud.

"Accident up on Batian."

"Full mountain rescue drill?" The farmer was already at the phone; his wife was heating tea water and cutting bread.

Kendrick nodded and drank scalding tea. All the farmers on Kirinyaga's approaches knew about accidents on the mountain. The call would go through the Nairobi police, who would relay by shortwave. He set aside the mug regretfully. The farmer was full of objections.

"Man, you'll be in no condition to make it back up."

"And they'll be in no condition to wait up there alone."

He remembered little of the climb after he had smashed and

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bulled the Land Rover two miles uphill beyond the Meteorological Clearing before bogging down entirely. Watery dawn slashed through renewed rain to greet him at the treeline. The bog should have finished him; then, fording the rapid rain-swollen Naru Moru by Teleki Hut, he knew he was all through.

He kept on.

At Klarwill's he collapsed on what was left of the floor. He cried. He collected his climbing gear and went on.

The sun appeared to taunt him while he was on a lateral moraine from the track to the stream below the Lewis Glacier. He made the stiff scramble to Two-Tarn Hut and passed it without pausing. The rest of the climb was made by instinct and will power only. His body merely continued to respond in familiar physical ways to familiar stimuli. Moving was as involuntary as breathing.

He got there too late. Waiting for the rescue party, he knew he'd driven his body beyond the normal limits of endurance because he had feared from the beginning that he would be too late.

The press conference was held two afternoons later in the lounge of Nyeri's Outspan Hotel. Burke Hamlin had refused hospitalization beyond having his arm set and being treated for exposure. He lounged on one of the superbly comfortable old couches, hemmed in by reporters, tourists, onlookers, flacks, studio people. Cameras and mikes. His cast already scrawled with bawdy sentiments, a large whiskey at his elbow. As he'd said in an earlier context, damned good theater.

"Does the broken arm hamper you much, Mr. Hamlin?"

"I tend to spill more drinks."

"The mountain sequences were finished. What were you looking for up on Kirinyaga?"

"Read *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*."

"That isn't really an answer, is it, Mr. Hamlin?"

"It is for me."

"What can you tell us of the tragic death of Mr. Perkins?"

Stern sorrow molded the craggy features. The drink was set aside unspilled. Kendrick, in a doorway well back from the crowd, thought it was an excellent performance.

"What can one say when his best is not good enough? He died of cold and exposure and shock before the rescuers arrived."

It broke up. Kendrick wandered tree-shaded paths, his

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nostrils full of the rich scents of tropical blooms. Warm air caressed his skin. He had slept the clock around. The Outspan was an old Colonial hotel, airy, spacious, quiet, civilized.

Cold and exposure and shock.

He looked between the branches of a scarlet-flowered Nandi flame tree toward Kirinyaga, 40 miles away, with her head buried in clouds of her own making. Here, deep blue sky filled with stately gray-hulled clipper ships which would close ranks and fire salvos of rain at four o'clock.

Cold and exposure and shock. Neat and cosmetic, antiseptic as a hospital bed.

Reality was a bit more gross. Perkins was frozen solid. Lips pulled back from the canines in a perpetual trapped hyena snarl. Fingers clawed into blunted parodies of a leopard's talons. Eyeballs staring through their contact lenses of ice.

And Kendrick couldn't really condemn Hamlin for it. Blind panic. How many cracked in battle under similar stress, and while surrounded by companions and trained to it besides? Alone, on a mountain ridge with Kirinyaga slavering above you—

Couldn't condemn, but couldn't let it happen again so someone else would die. He knocked on the actor's door just before four o'clock, under a clouded sky with pre-rain wind dancing dust devils in the parking lot.

"It's open."

Hamlin was alone in the room, sitting in a chair with his bare feet crossed on the foot of the bed. He had a drink in his left hand.

"Pulling out at first light," said Kendrick.

"And you came to say goodbye? How touching." The magnificent leonine head followed Kendrick across the room as if to camera cues. He set his bare feet on the rug. "Did I forget to thank you for saving my life?"

"And for not saving Perkins'?"

"Meaning what, precisely?" asked Hamlin carefully.

Kendrick relaxed against the wall. The assurance he'd sought was in the raw edges of Hamlin's voice, in the whiteness of his fingers around the glass. Kendrick shook his head chidingly.

"It won't do, Hamlin. The ends of the safety rope. The broken arm. The zipped-up sleeping bag."

Hamlin stood up. He swayed slightly, not from drink. His face was pale, something akin to terror was in his eyes.

"I'm not going to listen to this, Kendrick. My arm—"

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"—was broken by yourself, deliberately, when you saw me coming up the mountain the next morning. You were clinging to that rock face with both hands the first time I saw you. *Both hands.* I'll grant it takes courage of a sort to jam your forearm between a couple of rocks—" He made a snapping motion with his hands. "It's the image that's all important, isn't it? The image is everything."

"Don't think I'll admit—"

"And the safety rope. Brand-new Perlon, a thirty percent stretch factor to absorb shock—you could have bounced Perkins up and down on it like a yoyo and it wouldn't have broken."

"It broke." Sweat stood on Hamlin's face; his eyes were like knobs of bone in spoiled meat. They found the closed bathroom door, returned to Kendrick. "Broke. Broke. You weren't there, you couldn't know. It broke, I tell you."

"Two feet off your belt where it would have no chance to be rubbed through? It was cut. Perkins started sliding, screaming, you panicked and cut him loose."

"Who—who would believe—"

Kendrick laughed. It wasn't a pleasant laugh. Poor bloody Perkins. Poor bloody Hamlin, for all that.

"Nobody has to. I just wanted you aware that *I* know. So if you ever get your nerve back and are ever tempted again—"

Hamlin sat down heavily. He stared straight ahead.

"The cold," he said in a strangled voice. "The altitude." He shuddered abruptly. "Do you think I ever again—"

"Good." Kendrick's face hardened. "That leaves Perkins. Frozen solid in his sleeping bag and his blankets."

"You—you found him yourself."

"Only if he'd been *out* of the sleeping bag. *Out* of the blankets. Even in delirium he couldn't have unzipped that bag. But you could. You still had both arms then, you could take away the blankets and bag for yourself, put them back when you saw me on my way. You were afraid of freezing."

"He was finished. Done for." Hamlin was panting, sweating, hunched in his chair like a man who'd been fed arsenic. "Just a vegetable. Oh, it's easy for you! You're never tired. Never frightened. I was afraid to die. Afraid. Can you understand that? Can you?"

The bathroom door opened and Morna came out. Must have gone in there when Kendrick had knocked and stayed there quietly, listening. No wonder Hamlin had tried to

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keep him from talking about it. Morna, who wanted a strong man, a self-sufficient man; Morna, who had dumped Kendrick because he hadn't measured up. Now Hamlin had been stripped, exposed to her scorn.

"No, he can't understand that, Burke," she said in a low deadly voice. "He's never needed anyone or anything in his life." She met Kendrick's gaze, a strange look on her lovely face. "Is it true? The things you've accused him of?"

Kendrick shrugged. "I wasn't accusing. Just telling him what I knew. It doesn't go any further."

"All right, you've told him. Now get out and leave us alone."

She was on her knees beside the sobbing actor, her arms around his massive shoulders, cooing soft words to him. She looked at Kendrick past the magnificent shaggy head, her eyes ablaze.

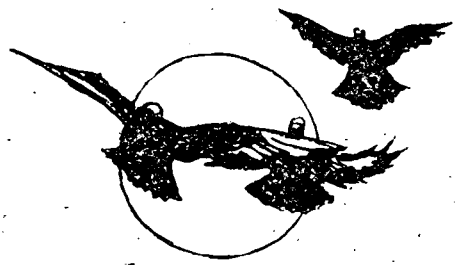
"*He* needs me!" she cried triumphantly.

Kendrick felt as if he had narrowly missed being struck by a train. He also felt nauseated. He said, "Yes. He needs you. God help him."

He left the room. The first broad drops of rain were making dime-sized splotches on the tarmac, making it smell of wet tar. Kendrick looked instinctively to the east. Just gray cloud massed there now, all the way to the horizon. But somewhere behind it—

He shuddered. Morna had been wrong, of course, when she'd said he had never needed anybody or anything. He stared at the clouds, as if able to see through them to Kirinyaga, waiting there with her fangs bared and gleaming.

Waiting. For Kendrick.



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a *NEW* detective story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

The newest in The-Man-Who-and-The-Woman-Who-and-The-Boy-Who series, but this time it's The-Girl-Who. You don't have to be a J. J. Marric-John Creasey fan to enjoy this story, but to give you a reminder of the real McMarric, we couple this story with a short-short about Gideon—alas, the last Gideon story we have in inventory . . .

THE GIRL WHO READ JOHN CREASEY

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

Stiffly Emil Pratt hitched himself out of his car and plodded up the side steps of his house. His mind was groggy, and his feet ached with every step he took. These double tours of duty were getting to be too much for him. He'd ask the captain for some kind of desk job once the Dawkins case was closed.

If it ever was closed.

He opened the side door and entered the kitchen. Warmth, and the smell of frying chicken. With a little sigh he sagged into a chair.

"Oh, Emil, you look exhausted," said his wife Dorothy, who was standing at the stove. "Supper will be on the table soon, honey. Marilee, come take your father's coat and hang it up."

"In a minute, Mom," said a voice from the living room.

"Please, Marilee. You can finish that book after supper."

"Okay, Mom. Whatever you say." Fifteen-year-old Marilee Pratt shuffled into the kitchen. She wore one of her father's old white shirts, tucked into faded blue jeans on one knee of which was a large patch with the words: *If at first you do succeed—try hard to hide your astonishment.* On her feet were furry white slippers which looked to her father like a cou-

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ple of dead rabbits. With one hand she was holding a book open in front of her face; in the other hand was an apple which disappeared behind the book from time to time, with appropriate munching sounds.

Emil shucked off his coat and draped it over one of his daughter's arms. "Want me to take your gun, too?" asked Marilee, nodding at the holster on Emil's belt.

"Naw, I just want to eat and then get some shuteye," said Emil. "I gotta be back first thing in the morning."

"You've hardly been home all week, Emil." Dorothy Pratt's eyes mirrored her concern for her husband. "How long can you go on like this?"

"Until we break the Dawkins case," Emil answered. "And it isn't just those of us at the precinct, honey. Homicide's been working just as hard today explaining things to some guy from the British Consulate. Hell! Why couldn't Fred Dawkins at least have been a United States citizen?"

"Supper's ready, Marilee!" called Dorothy. "Come on. Don't keep your father waiting."

Again Marilee entered the kitchen, still holding the book. "Let's make a deal," said Dorothy. "If you don't spend suppertime reading, you won't have to help with the dishes."

"But gee, Mom, I'm right at the good part. Besides, I won't have time to help with the dishes anyway. I've got to finish the book for an assignment at school. We have to read something in which the setting is important and do a paper on the city where the story takes place."

"And you left everything until the last minute as usual, I suppose?" said Emil with a smile.

"Well," said Marilee slowly, "it was due this morning. But I got a one-day extension from Mr. Budwick. You two go ahead and talk. I'll listen while I'm reading."

"Who can argue with logic like that?" laughed her father.

"But you're so seldom here for meals lately, Emil," said Dorothy.

"Oh, let her read. I'm too tired to care anyway." He peered at the book's jacket. "*Gideon's Staff*," he read slowly. "By J. J. Marric. Is it something about the Bible, darlin'?"

"No, Daddy. It's about a detective named George Gideon —G.G. to his friends. He's Commander of Scotland Yard's Criminal Investigation Department in London. He does all kinds of real neat things. Right now he's investigating four murders—including two policemen—and a man who's going

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to blow himself up with nitroglycerine. It's a lot more exciting than real-life detective work, I bet."

"Oh?" Emil's expression registered mock surprise. "And what does that make me?"

Tears sprang to Marilee's eyes. "Daddy, I—didn't—"

"It's all right," said Emil soothingly. "A lot of what we do at the precinct *isn't* very exciting. But the author—Marric—sounds European. What's he doing writing about London?"

"Oh, Marric's just a pen name. His real name is John Creasey and he's written tons of books. So he uses a lot of different names." She paused, and her lower lip began to quiver. "I didn't really mean it, about what you do at work," she went on. "It's just that—well, when people find out my father's a detective they want to hear something exciting about you. But you seem to spend so much time just asking questions and making out reports."

"Well, I'm working on a case now that your friends might think pretty exciting," said Emil. "It's a murder. You've probably read about it in the papers. Fred Dawkins."

"Murder?" Marilee Pratt looked enraptured. "Tell us all about it, Daddy. Please."

"Look, haven't you got that assignment to do?"

"Oh, I've already read up on the background—London."

"Marilee, your father's tired," said Dorothy.

"No, that's all right," said Emil indulgently. "But I wish I had your man Gideon working on this one, darlin'. You see, Fred Dawkins was a British subject. Born in London, practically across the street from the Bank of England."

"Then he's a real Cockney," said Marilee.

"Huh?"

"St. Mary-le-Bow Church is in that part of the city," the girl said. "So this man Dawkins was born within hearing of Bow Bells. And that's what makes a real Cockney."

"It does, eh? Where did you find that out?"

"It's for the assignment. The one about Commander Gideon. I've done a lot of studying about London. But go on, Daddy. Tell me about the murder."

"Well, a few weeks ago Dawkins apparently won some kind of a football pool in England. Came into a lot of money. About twelve hundred pounds, whatever that comes to."

"Around three thousand dollars," prompted Marilee.

"Uh huh. So, being single with no family, he decided to take a trip to the States. First stop, New York City. He got a

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room at the Parkleigh Hotel, right in the center of town. Then he did a damfool thing."

"Emil, such language in front of your daughter," said Dorothy.

"Oh, that's okay, Mom. Tell me, Daddy. What was the damfool thing Mr. Dawkins did?"

"He got all his prize money converted into cash—American dollars."

"Why did he do that?" asked Dorothy.

"Seems he didn't trust banks. Never had enough money to have an account before he won the pool. And once he got to New York he had a yen to see all his winnings in cash."

"How'd you find that out?" asked Marilee. "I mean, if Dawkins was murdered—"

"The bellhop who serviced Dawkins' room told us. A little old guy named Paul Kipps—he came from England too. The two of 'em struck up quite an acquaintance as soon as Dawkins found out Kipps was a fellow countryman and could get him a bottle of real English stout whenever he wanted it. The first day there, Dawkins told Kipps practically his whole life history."

For a moment Emil was silent, chewing a forkful of salad. "Poor Kipps," he continued finally. "He's the one who found Dawkins' body. Beside the bed, with a knife in it. When I first saw Kipps, I thought he was going to start crying. Of course I don't know which he missed most—Dawkins or the big tips he handed out."

"Oh, Emil," said Dorothy, "I don't like all this talk about murder while we're eating."

"Go on, Daddy," said Marilee. "Please."

"Well, I took the call from the officer on the beat after Kipps reported finding the body to him. Both Kipps and the officer met me out in front when I got to the Parkleigh."

"I'll bet there was a lot of excitement about the body," said Marilee.

"You don't know New York hotels," smiled Emil. "They don't want any bad publicity. Kipps had kept his cool, so the rest of the guests didn't know about the body. The officer took one look into the room, then called me. But aside from the three of us—and the hotel manager, of course—it was business as usual at the Parkleigh. The whole thing was hushed up. A little too hushed up, as it turned out."

"What do you mean by that, Daddy?"

"When I went into the room, the body looked dead enough. But when I got down close, I could see Dawkins was still breathing just a little."

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"You mean the man was still alive?" gulped Dorothy. "With a knife in him?"

"Just about," nodded Emil. "Apparently Kipps took one look inside—it was night, remember, and only a single light on—and assumed Dawkins was dead. The officer should have checked closer, but the fact is, he didn't. Some people don't like to get too near corpses, even cops."

Dorothy, her face a bit green, cast her eyes upward. Marilee motioned impatiently for her father to continue.

"Anyway, Dawkins was barely alive when I got to him. Next to him was an empty briefcase with a broken lock. I figure that's where Dawkins kept his money before his killer took it."

"Did he say anything?" asked Marilee.

"Yeah. He opened his eyes real slow. He saw me bending over him. Then he said something that sounded like 'fishin'."

"Fishin', Daddy?"

"Yep. After that he gulped and got out a few more words. 'Twas Ol' Fishin' as done me in.' At least that's what it sounded like to me. But the effort of talking must have been too much for him. Blood began spilling out of his mouth and he went limp. I yelled to the officer to get a doctor, but Dawkins died right there in my arms."

"A dying message!" exclaimed Marilee, clasping her hands ecstatically.

"Yeah, it was a dying message, all right. One that's had me climbing the wall ever since I heard it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"When there's been a murder, a lot of people have to be around to start the investigation. The medical examiner, laboratory technicians, homicide detectives, and so on. They were as quiet as they could be, but they still woke up about everybody on that floor of the hotel. Since people were coming out into the hall anyway, I used the time to ask them some questions. It seems Dawkins had gotten friendly with three other men who were staying at the hotel. As a matter of fact, the four of 'em had been in a poker game in Dawkins' room earlier that same evening."

"And you think one of them killed him?" asked Marilee.

"It has to be. They were the only ones who'd been in the room and knew he had all that money."

"Then if you can just connect one of them with 'fishin'—"

"It's not that easy, darlin'. The first of the three I talked to

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was a Rudolph Steinman. About seventy, thick glasses, almost completely bald. He was in town to visit the Cloisters. He's got a thing about medieval tapestries."

"I don't see how he could—"

"Steinman's a professor of physics up in Canada somewhere. During World War II he was one of the brains behind the Manhattan Project—the atomic bomb thing. I'm sure he'd have told Dawkins about it."

"Nuclear fission," said Marilee softly. "Daddy, that's it. Dawkins didn't say 'fishin'—he said 'fission'. Steinman did it."

"Yeah?" Emil sank his teeth into a chicken leg. "That's what I thought at first. But Steinman told me about Dawkins' other two friends. One of 'em was John Langworthy. Sixty-two years old, nuts about opera. He'd spent most of his time in New York up at Lincoln Center. Runs a factory in St. Paul. What do you think he manufactures? Yeah, fishing rods and reels."

"But that doesn't have anything to do with atomic fission," said Marilee.

"The way Dawkins was mumbling," Emil said, "I figure he might have been saying either 'fishin' or 'fission.' He might have called Langworthy 'Ol' Fishin'—or something like that—because of the stuff he manufactures."

Marilee nodded. "But, Daddy, that's only two men. And if you're sure one of them killed Dawkins, can't you have them both investigated?"

"It's not quite that easy. If we need a certain number of men to investigate one person, it takes twice that many for two. And when we add a third—"

"Emil," said his wife, "don't you think you should finish your supper and go up to bed? I'm not sure all this talk about murder is good for Marilee."

"Oh, Mother," the girl said. "I'm fine. Come on, Daddy, tell me about the third man."

"A schoolteacher from New Jersey. Doing some kind of research. Most days he hung out at the public library at 42nd and Fifth Avenue."

"Well, at least you can't suspect him," said Marilee.

"No? His name's Bass. Leland Bass. And a bass is a fish. So it is possible Dawkins called him Ol' Fishin'. You see, there's my problem. If we knew which one of the three to zero in on, we'd find the evidence quick enough. But we've had to spread our available manpower too thin, tracking down the backgrounds and movements of all three. I'm sure we'll get the killer eventually. But in the meantime the

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British government is after us for action, Langworthy's family is raising the roof because he didn't come back home when he was supposed to, and Bass is afraid that with all the bad publicity he may lose his job. Steinman's about the only one who's taking this investigation at all well."

Emil pointed tiredly toward the book in front of his daughter. "Wish I had your Commander Gideon's help on this case."

"Do you suspect any one more than the others?" Marilee asked.

"At first we were pretty sure it was Bass, the teacher. Both Steinman and Langworthy are fairly wealthy men. Three thousand dollars is a lot of money, but not enough to make them kill for it."

"You said 'at first'," said Marilee. "That sounds like you're not so sure any more that it's Bass."

Emil nodded glumly. "We found out Bass writes books on the side. No bestsellers, but with his teacher's salary he's not hurting for money. Besides, Steinman and Langworthy both agree that Dawkins probably wouldn't have called Bass Ol' Fishin'. He had another nickname for the teacher, though heaven only knows where he got it."

"What nickname?" asked Dorothy, looking better now that there was less talk of dead bodies.

Grinning broadly, her husband shook his head as if puzzled by the foibles of the world. "Bonnie," he chuckled.

"Bonnie?"

"Yep. Isn't that the craziest—"

"Oh!" Emil and Dorothy both turned to stare at their daughter. Marilee was sitting bolt upright in her chair. Both hands were clapped over her mouth, and her eyes were big and round.

"Are you all right, darlin'?" asked Emil. "Did something go down the wrong way?"

Slowly Marilee shook her head.

"What is it then?"

"Daddy, I think I know who killed Mr. Dawkins."

Emil gave a roar of laughter. "So you think you're better than all of New York's finest, do you?" he hooted.

"Not me, Daddy. Commander Gideon."

"Huh?"

"No, I don't mean that, either. But you remember I told you I had to do some research on London for the paper I'm writing about *Gideon's Staff*?"

"Yeah," said Emil, suddenly serious. "What about it?"

"Well, you said Mr. Dawkins was a Cockney."

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"Actually you said it. But go on."

"Daddy, did you know that in the Nineteenth Century, London pickpockets made up a kind of slang so the police wouldn't understand them?"

"No. But then, this isn't the Nineteenth Century. And we're not talking about London, either."

"Yes, we are. Lots of Cockneys still use that slang. It works by rhymes. Like 'apples and pears' means stairs. 'Mince pie' is eye, and 'sky rocket' is—"

"Pocket, maybe?" asked Emil.

"That's it, Daddy. So if I said, 'I'm taking a ball of chalk up the frog and toad,' it means I'm taking a walk up the road. See?"

"Marilee," said Dorothy, "I don't think your father's interested in a lecture on—"

"Wait a minute," said Emil, waving his wife into silence. "Go on, Marilee."

"Finally the Cockneys got so used to the slang that they could make it shorter. So 'I'm taking a ball up the frog' would still mean a walk up the road."

"But what's that got to do with the case I'm working on?"

"Oh, Daddy. Mr. Dawkins was a Cockney. He called Mr. Bass 'Bonnie.' What would that be in rhyming slang?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

" 'Bonnie Lass,' that's what. Mr. Dawkins' name for the teacher was Bonnie Lass, because it rhymed with Bass."

"Okay," said Emil. "But what's the connection between this and what Dawkins told me—Ol' Fishin'?"

"Daddy, your suspect has to be old, right?"

"I suppose so. But that applies to all three."

"Yes, but he also has to be someone who'd been in Dawkins' hotel room and had seen the money. Someone who might have needed that money enough to kill for it."

"Thanks a lot. All three men were in the room that evening. And that last thing you said eliminates everybody."

"No, it doesn't." Marilee's eyes glittered with excitement. "Ol' Fishin'. But there's another thing Mr. Dawkins might have been saying."

"What's that?"

Marilee paused dramatically. "Fish and—"

For a moment Emil Pratt wrinkled his brow thoughtfully. Then suddenly he stared at Marilee. He sprang from his chair, rounded the table, and hugged his daughter in his huge arms. "You're wonderful!" he cried. "Your research paper is wonderful! Even your Commander Gideon is wonderful!"

Dorothy Pratt, who had failed

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to make head or tail of the conversation between her daughter and her husband, began picking up the dishes from the table and piling them in the sink. "My family are all wonderful," she said positively. "But I still don't get it."

"Dawkins wasn't talking about fission or fishin'." Emil was shouting and laughing at the same time. "He was using the rhyming slang Marilee described. And he was giving me the nickname he'd pinned on his murderer. A term dear to the heart of every Cockney."

"Oh?" said Dorothy, looking puzzled. "What?"

"Chips! Fish and Chips! Don't you see, honey? It wasn't any of the three guests who stabbed Dawkins. It was that little old bellhop who'd told us he'd discovered Dawkins' body—Paul Kipps!"

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9 *NEW* stories — including

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a *NEW* Gideon story by

J. J. MARRIC (John Creasey)

About Commander George Gideon, Chief of the C.I.D. (the Criminal Investigation Department at New Scotland Yard) . . . There are times when Gideon is deeply troubled about his job, times when he stops being a policeman and lets his emotions get the better of his reason. (Who would want it any other way?) . . .

GIDEON AND THE INNOCENT SHOPLIFTER

by J. J. MARRIC (John Creasey)

It was bad enough when the Metropolitan Police had to deal with criminals born and bred in the British Isles, and there were plenty of them. It was worse when a foreigner —an "alien" in the official terminology—was the suspect. It was worse still, in the opinion of George Gideon, the Commander of the Criminal Investigation Department at New Scotland Yard, when this foreigner was a young American.

Gideon seldom gave personal attention to petty larceny, unless there was something very special about it, and shoplifting normally became his worry only when it reached major proportions But an American teen-ager under suspicion of shoplifting was a different matter.

And so Gideon sent for the boy, now in custody at Cannon Row, the police station across the narrow road from Scotland Yard. At first sight Gideon was troubled. This was little more than a boy, small, fragile-looking, pale. Standing opposite Gideon, and completely dwarfed by him, Morris K. Barnes from Chicago looked like a Lilliputian confronting Gulliver.

Nevertheless, appearances could be deceptive, Gideon reminded himself. This might

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well be a hard, tough, professional criminal; in Chicago, as in nearly every large city in the world, they trained criminals young. He must not be swayed by the youth and apparent innocence of the lad now facing him.

"Your name is Morris K. Barnes?"

"Yes, sir."

"You came from Chicago to London by air last month?"

"That's right."

"You have a work permit for this country, and you said that you had a job at Hooper's, a department store, but this is not true."

"No, sir, it isn't true."

"Why did you lie?"

"I believed I could find a job when I came to England—but to get this job I had to have a permit, and to obtain the permit I had to have a job."

"Have you tried to find work since you've been in England?"

"Yes, sir."

"What kind of work?"

"Every kind, sir, from soda jerk to bellboy, but no one is interested in someone who only wants to stay for a few weeks."

"Can you give me any proof that you've applied for these jobs?"

"Yes, sir, I can show you letters received from employers who decided not to hire me."

"Why did you want to come to this country in the first place?"

"My grandparents came from London, and I always wanted to spend a summer in England. I'm still at high school, but I saved the money for my passage from a newspaper route."

"Have you ever been accused of any crime before?"

"No, sir, I have not."

"How much money did you have when you were arrested and charged with stealing goods from the chemist's shop?"

For the first time Morris K. Barnes looked puzzled.

"What's that, sir?"

"The chemist's shop. What you call a drug store."

The pale face cleared.

"I had what you call a sixpence and some coppers," young Barnes said respectfully.

"Where were you planning to sleep tonight?"

"In one of your parks, I guess."

"Have you slept out before?"

"Yes, sir, most nights since I've been in England. After my first week here I realized that all the money I'd brought with me was going on hotel bills. And I couldn't earn any more because I couldn't get a job."

"How much money did you bring with you?"

"Twenty-five dollars."

"Often been hungry?" demanded Gideon, almost angrily;

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but his heart was growing heavier within him, and the severity of his manner became harder to maintain.

"Yes, sir, I've been very hungry plenty of times."

"You had nowhere to sleep, you had no money, you were hungry, you had lied about your work permit and doubted if you could get a job. Is that the picture?"

"Yes, sir, that's right," the youth admitted slowly.

"So you went into the chem—the drug store and stole some cosmetics, hoping to sell them and get some food, at least."

The young American did not reply immediately. He drew himself up to his full height, and pride was like a cloak about him. He looked Gideon straight in the eyes, and said, "No, sir, I did not steal."

"You went into this drug store. You took certain articles from the counter. The manager asked you for payment and you admitted that you could not pay. So the manager sent for a policeman."

"That is true, sir."

"Why did you take the goods from the counter?"

The pale cheeks were touched with pink, but the steady gaze did not falter.

"I had an idea, sir. Oh, I know it sounds crazy now, but then—well, I was so desperate I just didn't stop to work it all out. I thought that if the manager would let me try to sell some of the goods in the street—there were lots of people outside, but none of them came into the shop—I might earn a commission. I didn't know you had to have a permit—*another* permit"—the boy's lips curved in a wry smile—"to do this. Oh, yes, sir, I see now that the whole thing was impossible—even if I'd *had* the permit, how was he to know I wouldn't just walk off with the stuff and not come back? But *I* knew I'd come back, and somehow—well, I just thought *he* would know it, too.

"I *was* taking the stuff to the manager, sir, I really was. I thought if I actually had the things in my hand he couldn't refuse to let me try, especially as he had no customers. I told him this, sir, but he wouldn't believe me. He thought I was stealing them."

"I'm not sure I blame him," said Gideon dryly. "What did he say to you?"

"He said I was a bloody lying Yank, sir."

"And what did you do then?"

"I hit him, sir."

"I understand you have a powerful punch," Gideon remarked.

"I box featherweight, sir. I'm

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the high school champion. I'm sorry I hit the man. I really am."

"He is not proceeding with a charge of assault, only with a charge of shoplifting," Gideon said. "Did you tell anyone else about your idea?"

"No, sir. It came to me suddenly. There was a bar next door to the drug store and I thought if I could only make enough commission for one meal, maybe my luck would change."

Gideon contemplated the boy for what seemed a long time. The young American moistened his lips and Gideon thought he was fighting back tears.

"Do you like London?" Gideon asked abruptly.

The boy's expression changed.

"Yes, sir. I—yes, *sir!* I think London's a wonderful city. Every day I visit someplace I haven't seen before." His eyes were bright with enthusiasm. "I've been to all the places I've read about, like the Tower of London and the National Gallery and the Monument and the markets and—oh, almost everywhere, sir. I certainly like London. In one way I was glad I couldn't get work, because I had plenty of time to visit these places."

"Which did you like most?" asked Gideon.

The youth did not answer at first, but his eyes clouded; a question intended to lighten the mood had in fact brought tension. Gideon, by now more than half convinced of the boy's honesty, concentrated on this change of expression.

Slowly and deliberately Barnes answered.

"I guess it was the day I spent at the Old Bailey. I had heard a lot about British justice, and I certainly saw it in action."

His answer could be cleverly calculated; or it could be genuine. Was there any way in which Gideon could make absolutely sure whether or not Barnes spoke the truth? After a long pause he put a very different question, wondering as he did so at his concern to establish the boy's innocence; it was almost as if he were dealing with the future of his own son.

"If you stood trial by jury, and the evidence given was exactly what you've told me, what verdict would you expect?"

The answer came almost at once.

"Guilty, I guess."

"So you know your story doesn't sound convincing?"

Another pause, and the boy answered, "I know that very few people will believe me, sir." He stopped abruptly, as if checking himself from going on, and Gideon waited. Now the

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expressive face showed a certain diffidence. "May I ask you a question, sir?"

"Yes."

"Do *you* believe me?" demanded Morris K. Barnes.

I should have expected it, thought Gideon, deeply troubled. I've stopped being a policeman, I've let my emotions get the better of my reason. He did not answer, still cudgeling his brain for a way to make absolutely sure of the boy's honesty. But he could see none. He could, however, see the disappointment which began to affect the other, and could imagine the despair which had begun to creep over him. Still silent, Gideon faced the fact that, demanding the truth from this boy, he himself had now to give an answer which must be true.

At last he spoke. "Before I tell you what I think you must understand this. My opinion doesn't affect the law. The law is served by evidence, not by opinions. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. I do believe you."

After the first shock of surprise, happiness shone from the dark eyes, but Gideon was still troubled. He might believe that the boy's story was true. But would a magistrate believe it?

"Thank you," said Morris K. Barnes.

"You still have to satisfy the magistrate," Gideon reminded him. "And I can't prove, and you can't prove, what was really in your mind when you took those things from the counter." He frowned. This was a charge brought by the company concerned; there was no way in which the police would now drop it, no way in which they could try to persuade the company to drop it. Yet much of what the lad had said *could* be proved, if he, Gideon, was prepared to take a little extra trouble.

Gideon's sense of responsibility toward this boy suddenly seemed very great indeed.

He stood up, walked slowly round the heavy desk, and placed a hand on the boy's shoulder. "I want you to plead not guilty when you are charged, and I shall arrange for someone to ask you some of the questions I have asked you today. I'll have your answers checked, so they had better be the same ones you've given me. Then you'll have to hope for the best from British justice."

"The answers are true, sir," Morris K. Barnes said, "so they will be the same."

That evening Gideon was totally unable to dismiss the boy from his mind, and the next morning found him sitting in

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court listening intently to questions and answers. Each reply given by the young American was the identical one he had given Gideon the previous day; each emotion throbbing in his voice, passing over his face, was the same emotion he had shown before.

And the impression he made on the court was the same impression he had made on Gideon.

The solicitor for the complainants conferred in whispers with the gray-haired shop manager. The elderly magistrate frowned, as Gideon had frowned, obviously of two minds.

"Is anything known about the accused?" the magistrate asked sharply.

A police officer stood up.

"We have made certain inquiries, sir, and the accused's statements on all matters which can be proved have been verified up to the moment when he stepped inside the shop. That is all, sir."

There was a short pause. Then the solicitor for the complainants stood up, looked about him, stared at the pale-faced American boy in the dock, and said, "With your permission, your worship, my clients would like to withdraw the charge. They feel there is sufficient doubt, in view of all that has been said, as to whether the accused *did* intend to steal. Moreover, they would be glad to take Mr. Barnes into their employ while he remains in London, your worship."

It was one of the few occasions on which Gideon had seen that particular magistrate smile.

"A very sensible decision," the magistrate said. "I hope you enjoy the rest of your stay with us, young man."

But the young man did not seem to hear him; he was looking at Gideon.

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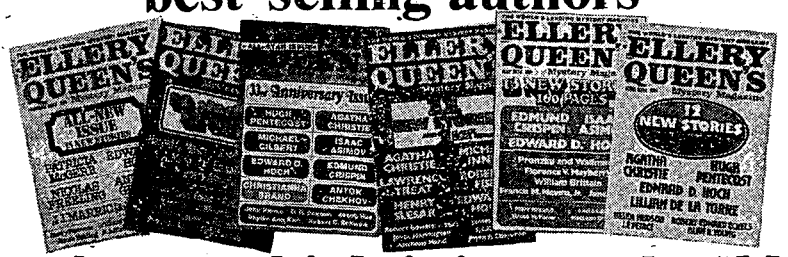

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

This time, to cheer your mentor as well as those who read, we begin with a new detective novel of such high quality that it may fairly be called memorable, and continue through mystery-adventure and mystery-conspiracy to espionage. If those three succeeding items seem less impressive than the first, it is not easy even for good work to bear comparison with the very best.

And every story will entertain you; you can't go wrong here.

With *Reverend Randollph and the Wages of Sin,* by Charles Merrill Smith (Putnam, $6.95), the clerical roster stands complete. Joining such famous sleuths as Father Brown and Rabbi Small comes Dr. C. P. Randollph, former professional football player as well as ordained Protestant minister, but scholar and theologian, too.

Shrewd, tolerant, sympathetic, "C.P." is called as interim pastor of a wealthy Chicago church, whose board of trustees has been manipulating the funds. Already he has challenged this when the murder of an absconding trustee's beautiful wife, found nude and strangled in the choir room, threatens even worse scandal.

Cooperating with Police Lieutenant Casey, assisted by attractive Samantha Stack and advised by his broad-minded bishop, C.P. turns to detection. After some false starts he proves as adept as the author, himself a clergyman, proves adept at vivid character-drawing and the construction of ingenious plots. With humor, insight, and emotional strength, every clue in sight, we are swept towards a double-surprise finish of which even connoisseurs will anticipate only half the solution.

C. P. Randollph must not rest on his laurels. Apparently a first novel, this mystery is the most delightful for years.

Even today, we find from David Westheimer's *The Avila Gold* (Putnam, $7.95), a search for buried treasure can become sharp-fanged adventure when the treasure has been buried in some spot now so populous that each move must be made by stealth.

Among old papers dating back to Spanish-ruled California, Ar-

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thur McDowell, middle-aged and happily married professor of history at UCLA, finds the clue. A chest presumed full of gold coins may still lie buried beneath the rear patio of the reconstructed Avila hacienda in downtown Los Angeles. McDowell, who would have reported the discovery to authority, is persuaded otherwise by his young friend Steve Sussman, professorial engineer.

To meet all expenses of tunneling underground for the chest, these impecunious teachers must take as their partner wealthy Colonel Pike, tough military martinet.

Most often a tale of treasure proves only hoax or illusion, but not this one. Despite McDowell's affair with shapely Gloria, despite thieves closing in, despite accidental death which may be called murder, our friends win through to heaping riches and a satisfactory end.

The Season of Danger, by Rosemary Gatenby (Dodd, Mead, $5.95), provides many evil machinations in sophisticated mystery-conspiracy undiluted with too much romance.

It seems incredible that James Everest, rich and famous novelist who has chosen to withdraw from the world behind companions and guards, can be held prisoner on one of his own estates. Yet to Jack Seavering of *Perspective,* alone among newsmen admitted for an interview, Everest appeals with the single desperate word, *help.*

If the man's guards are in fact his jailers, he has only to tell the whole press. Or hasn't he? What's going on here?

Determined to find out, Seavering meets obstruction or sheer disbelief until he joins forces with Linnet Emries, that alluring widow, and persuades Everest's canny editor as well. Fast action sweeps us from the Texas estate to surroundings more tropical, and to one more surprise twist before the final curtain.

As for the cloak-and-dagger work of Robin Close's *The Bohème Combination* (Walker, $5.95), you may argue whether cloak dominates dagger or vice versa, since each is used freely by both sides.

Here's triple-dealing espionage. In Rome for economic talks, Richard Brandon, H.M. Treasury Intelligence, must foil Kremlin-inspired designs against his country's economy.

'Ware treachery everywhere, including the British Embassy. With Honey, that delectable girl, Brandon is caught and whirled from mayhem to murder or back again until the ironic climax. Rip Van Winkle himself would have stayed awake with this one.

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Mary Amlaw's first story, "Farewell, Beloved," appeared in the August 1974 issue of EQMM. You may recall that we described it as "a beautiful story, poetic and lyrical, but with a dread heartbeat."

Miss Amlaw's second story is also full of heart—and heartache. It is about a "sign," about a dream to believe in, about a place where loved ones are waiting . . .

STEAMERS FOR SUPPER

by MARY AMLAW

Great silent tears crept from my sister Lillian's old-woman's eyes. Indeed, she looked terribly old, lying on the bed, her hair as white as the pillowcase and her mouth half open, sobbing for air.

The tears were tears of joy. "Just look at him!" she urged me. "See how much he loves me!"

Her window overlooked our spit of beach a hundred yards below. Late afternoon sun tipped the marsh grass with gold and overlaid lavender shadings on the wet sand. I saw the ghosts of ourselves as we had been years ago—Dad and my brothers clamming, Lillian and I running like happy sprites from one to the other of them.

Now the beach was deserted save for George, Lillian's husband. He attacked the muddy sand with hard stabbing strokes. Energy without enthusiasm. Like a prisoner condemned to hard labor working under the overseer's nose.

A week earlier I would have said like a vicious dog.

"You misjudged him," Lillian said. "Admit it."

I patted her hand, not quite able to reverse myself. It was hard to believe that love of Lillian, and love alone, had sent George out to dig in ninety-degree heat because Lillian had a craving for steamers from our own beach for supper. And yet everything he had done all week seemed to prove his devo-

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tion. But I seemed to need something more, a sign I wouldn't recognize until it occurred, to convince me.

"Why don't you like him?" Lillian asked. "I know you don't. I can feel it."

Indeed, I didn't like him. Not now that he was living under my roof, not nine years ago when Lillian married him, not when Mama and Dada were alive, and George was a little boy tagging after his father who was our yardman.

I tried to distract Lillian, who was always distressed by my dislike. "Did I tell you I dreamed of the family again last night?" I asked. "Dada and the boys, and Mama in her big picture hat."

"Did you, Hattie?" Lillian pushed herself up, her eyes glowing. She had beautiful eyes still, warm and brown as the inside of a pansy. "They must be near us in spirit. Oh, how much I want to join them!" She sank back with a contented sigh. "Except George, poor lamb, would be heartbroken to lose me, I think I could close my eyes and drift right off to wherever Dada and Mama and the boys are waiting."

If he'd be so heartbroken, I wondered, then how come Lillian had arrived at my door in the middle of the night, alone and in tears?

"Tell me the dream," she asked.

"It was like all the others. Mama in her picture hat and us on the beach, the boys clamming, you and me peering into their pails, and Dada saying, 'Steamers for supper.'"

I didn't add that last night the dream hadn't ended there. After Dada said "Steamers," the sky turned black and his face enlarged like a movie blowup. "Make George eat the clams. We're waiting," he said urgently. Then his face melted into George's, but not as George is, with a certain overblown handsomeness still, but George in a Dorian Gray version, puffy cheeks, side-slipping eyes, twisted mouth snarling, "Die, you old hag! Die!"

Lillian shook her finger at me playfully. "Shame, Hattie, trying to change the subject! You're not putting me off this time. Tell me why you don't like George." Her eyes sparkled with mischief. "You're never jealous because I found myself a man and you didn't!"

As if I could be jealous of Lillian, the adored, perfect older sister, the only kin I had left! No, the trouble was in George.

He was ten years younger than I and 16 years younger than Lillian. That had always bothered me though I couldn't explain why.

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"Something's stuck in my craw ever since he was a child," I admitted. Lillian looked at me expectantly.

Even as a child George had a discontented air about him. Surly. He used to mimic my father's walk behind his back. Once I caught him at it. He was strutting about, examining the flower beds and giving orders to imaginary servants. "Rake up those leaves! You there, clip that hedge! Dig up those roses and plant them on the other side of the door. I'm the master here! You'll do as I say!"

He was so serious! The frown on his dirty face, the hands clasped behind his jellybean-shaped body, his swagger had tickled me. I burst out laughing.

"So you're the master here, are you!" I teased him. "Pray forgive my intruding!" and I dropped him an elaborate curtsy.

He was only nine, but his voice had nothing childish in it. "I'm going to live here when I'm grown up," he vowed. "You'll do what I want you to then!"

When he came into the family as Lillian's husband—he was 37 and she 53—I remembered that threat. Not that George was giving any orders to either of us. But I always had the feeling he wanted to.

Lillian listened with that soft look women always have when they're hearing or speaking of the man they love.

"Poor little tyke," she murmured. "Of course he wanted to be master of a big house! He was starving poor as a child, Hattie. Beans and macaroni for every dinner, and many days no dinner at all. Eight children crammed into four rooms! Of course he wanted more."

She sighed, her eyes glowing with tenderness. "George thought we were the richest people in the world, with our big house and Mama's lawn parties, and our father a doctor. And pretending to be master here—he's always had a special interest in this house, Hattie. It was the only thing in his whole world to build a dream on."

The only interest George had in the house that I could see was finding fault. The very day he followed Lillian to my house, I found him moving a basket stuffed with paper all around the den. He had kept the springy walk of youth, and spun around on hearing me come in.

"Whatever are you doing?" I asked.

For a moment he faltered, as if I'd caught him at a secret rite that meant death to explain. Then his face darkened.

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"Look at this!" He waved the basket under my nose. "Full of paper and standing right under these filmy curtains! If a fire got started in all this trash, the curtains would catch and the whole house go up! Lillian would be killed in her bed, trapped by flames!"

I shrugged. "Fire's not likely in a house with no smokers."

He complained to Lillian. "Come back to the apartment where I can watch you better," he begged. She was touched by his concern but refused.

Tuesday I found him on his hands and knees on the living-room rug. "The condition of this place!" he scolded. "There's a hole here I can put my fist in. Why, if Lillian's heel caught in it, she might fall and whack her head on the raised hearth!"

I never saw such a man for complaining. "We don't use this room much now," I said. "We sit in the den."

Yesterday it was the back stairs that set him off. In the old days the maid used them; they go from Lillian's room to the pantry. I avoid them now that I'm older. They're too steep and narrow for my taste.

Didn't I hear a thumping and bumping on them that put my heart in my mouth? But it was only George, kneeling close to the top with hammer, nails, and string.

"I'm putting a handrail in here," he said when he saw me watching. "I'm measuring with the string." It was a nice bit of devotion on his part, I suppose, to want a handrail in case Lillian used those stairs; but it didn't convince me.

I needed my sign, and when it came, I'd know it. A show of devotion in front of me was all very well, but it didn't erase nine years of George playing golf and fiddling with the stock market while Lillian worked five days a week. But there was no point in distressing Lillian with my doubts about George. She was singing another bit of her eternal rhapsody to her husband.

"George saved my life, Hattie. The day before I came here, I told him my blood pressure pills tasted salty. The dear man wouldn't let me disturb myself by calling the drug store." She smiled fondly. "Nothing would do him but to take the pills himself straight back to the druggist. And do you know, the clerk had made a mistake? I'd been taking ordinary salt tablets!"

The telephone gave me an excuse to get away from her praises of George. Lillian lay on her pillows like an aged duchess, gazing serenely out the window, while I picked up the extension in the hall out-

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side her door. It was for George. He'd been getting business calls all week from people who wanted his advice on buying stocks.

"He won't be back for a bit," I said to the breathless feminine voice on the other end. "If you're one of his business friends, I'd be happy to take a message."

There was a throaty chuckle at the other end, the kind of contained mirth that signals a delicious private joke. Then the voice purred, "Tell him Janice called. Janice Darling." It was the kind of elegant purr that goes with platinum hair and expensive clothes. "Tell him maybe he has the patience to wait nine years for a killing, but I have to see enough capital in his hands by Friday to make my investment worthwhile. Otherwise, the deal's off."

I repeated it back to her. "Do you mean tomorrow, Friday?" I asked. "Or next week?"

"Oh, tomorrow, by all means," she purred. "This deal's been hanging fire too long as it is."

"Shall I ask him to call you?"

There was a little hesitation. Then the voice said, with small pauses between words that made them very impressive, "Call only if he has the capital he promised me. Not otherwise." She hung up with a cascade of feline chuckles. She sounded like the feather-brained sort who would do business with George, chuckling when an important deal seemed about to go wrong.

Lillian had overheard. She turned her head away from me. Far below we could see George still digging. As we watched he straightened up and wiped his forehead with his arm. He attacked the sand again with the clumsy extravagant motions of a man unused to physical labor, making the job harder than it had to be.

"Hattie," Lillian said softly, "I've done a bad thing." She closed her eyes. "I've lied to George," she said. "Because I love him so much."

Tears began sliding down her papery cheeks. "I'd die if it would please him! I'd give him my life's blood. I wanted to give him the world!" Her fingers kneaded the summerweight coverlet. "And what did I have to give? Nothing! Not even children."

I thought she'd done pretty well by him, waiting on him hand and foot until she took sick.

"I didn't have anything real to give him," Lillian wept. "But I could give him a dream. And I did."

The tears came faster. I sponged off her face.

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"It started as a joke, Hattie. Whenever George needed a little money to invest, I always had a few hundred saved from my salary to give him. He'd say, 'That's the ticket. Give me a chance to get as rich as my rich wife.' He thought I was only working to keep myself busy. He'd take the money and say, 'I guess there's plenty more where this came from, right?' and I'd say, 'Well, I have Dada's fortune.' Like a joke."

She could hardly talk now for tears. How old she looked, her hair white and witchy, and liver spots darkening on the backs of her hands. "George believed it was a real fortune," she sobbed. "And when I saw how much it meant to him to be rich, and remembered how poor he'd been growing up—oh, Hattie, I just couldn't tell him the truth! And when he needed money and I didn't have it to give, I'd say, 'Never mind, you'll have all Dada's fortune when I'm dead.' "

I kept patting her arm and sponging away the tears.

"Then the stock market went crazy," Lillian said brokenly. "We lost everything. I had my stroke and couldn't work. George begged me for money, just a few thousand to invest once the market improved. I didn't have a cent. That's why I came to you, all on a minute! I couldn't bear to refuse George and see myself becoming a burden on him."

She looked at me then, her eyes swimming with tears. "But you see how he loves me? He followed me. And because I wouldn't go back with him, he stays here to be near me. And now he's out in this sun digging steamers for me—" She buried her face in her hands and wept.

Lillian and I were so close we could feel with each other's feelings. I put my hand over hers. I understood why she let George go on believing in a lie. Everyone needs a dream to believe in. Otherwise life would be too hard to bear.

"You meant it as a kindness," I said, thinking it out. "You wanted to give him a gift equal to your love. Something for him to hold against the time he must lose you."

Lillian nodded, weeping.

"What's done is done," I decided. "He might as well keep his dream. And we were left a fortune, in a way—a right heart, and compassion, and love. It's a fortune a king might envy."

She took my hand and put it to her cheek. "Oh, thank you. Thank you, thank you! My dear little sister! You've made me feel much, much better."

Lillian dozed off. I went downstairs and made the salad

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for supper. I was just putting it in the refrigerator when George came in, stinking of the sewer-smell of low tide. Some would call him a nice-looking man still, with his silver-streaked hair and heavy build, even though he is running a little to fat. But his looks put me off. When he's around, the ten years between his 46 and my 56 feels like the no-man's land dividing middle from old age. In George's presence I feel ancient. Lillian must feel like a toothless old crone. Especially now that her hair is thinning and her joints are starting to stiffen.

George flung the pail at me. "Here's your stinking clams!" he barked. "I'm going to scrub for an hour. If I get any calls tell them I'll call back later."

"You did get a call." I read him the message from Janice Darling. He stood quiet as the air before a thunderstorm, sweat streaking his face and puddling on his clothes.

"Friday," he repeated. "She wants her capital Friday!"

He stalked around the kitchen muttering and pulling at his hair. In the middle of something that sounded like "Bitch!" he stopped and eyed me.

"Hattie, you and me are friends, right? I can get a straight answer from you, right? It's important."

All that man had done since he set foot in my house was criticize. I hardly knew what was coming.

"Does Lillian have much of a fortune?" he asked.

I didn't want to lie. "We were talking about it just a while ago," I told him. "I said it was a fortune a king might envy."

The bleak look faded from his eyes. Lillian was right; he needed a dream desperately. "And is she leaving it to you or me?"

"Oh, I have all I need. You're the one she's concerned about." His prickly mood was falling off him like a snake's skin. "You'll get everything Lillian has."

It was nice being able to spread contentment to someone as discontented as George. But as he grew calmer his eyes took on that greedy look I disliked.

"How long do you think Lillian can last, Hattie?" he asked. "It was a middling bad stroke, but people get over such things nowadays, and she's only sixty-two."

"We don't generally reach seventy," I told him. "I think Lillian would go but for one thing that's keeping her in this world."

He edged closer, all eyes.

"Her love for you," I told him.

Then as if the greed, once awakened in him, reached out to everything, he swung open

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the refrigerator door and began eating the salad right from the bowl. Scooping it up in his dirty hands and slurping the food out of them like a dog.

"You might as well finish it," I said. "No one's going to eat that after you've been pawing at it."

He shot me a funny look and brought the bowl to the window. "Mushrooms!" he yelped. "What are you trying to do, kill me? Mushrooms aren't safe! People are always getting poisoned on them!" He dumped the salad into the sink.

"Poison! That's a funny way to be thinking," I said. "Lillian and I have eaten mushrooms all our lives."

He rubbed his chin. The low-tide smell from him was strong and unpleasant. "I can't dope you two out," he muttered. "Either you're the cleverest pair alive, or the world's biggest fools. I wish I knew which."

I'm not accustomed to being insulted in my own house. Smarting from his words, I turned my back on him and put another salad together. Then I washed the clams and bedded them on ice.

George filled my mind. It was a good mark that he cared enough about Lillian to come after her, but even that wasn't enough to make me accept him. I kept seeing that greedy look in his eyes and wondering how it was he believed Lillian had a fortune. Our father hadn't been a fancy doctor or a big-name specialist making money hand over fist like some do today. We lived nicely, but it had taken all his income to do it. When he died there has hardly enough to bury him in style.

I guess it was having the house. Maybe a big house always looks like money to someone as poor as George had been.

I settled into the porch rocker thinking about George instead of reading the newspaper, and dozed off into my dream again. All of us clamming. Dada smiled and said, "Steamers for supper." He flung the clams in the air. They turned into seagulls and fell down as feathers. A ton of feathers.

They fell on Lillian's upturned smiling face, fell like a blizzard of snowgeese. Lillian stopped smiling. She tried to scream. Feathers flew into her nose and mouth and pressed on her eyes. Choking her. Fluttering in the air that she clawed at in vain. Suffocating her.

I woke gasping for breath. Lillian couldn't breathe. I could feel her panic. In I went and up the maid's stairs I hadn't used in months—it was the quickest way. Three steps from the top a string stretched shin-high from

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wall to wall where George had been measuring. How careless of him to leave it! Stepping over took a good five seconds. I burst into the back door of Lillian's room.

George was there before me, a pillow in his hands. Feathers were all over the floor. George jumped when I came in the door. I could see fear taking hold of him. His eyes went everywhere before coming back to me; he dropped the pillow he was holding. When he tried to speak, his voice wouldn't come.

When Lillian saw me, tears gushed from her eyes. She sat up in the bed. Her hair stood out as if it had been sitffened with whitewash. One hand covered her throat. The other pointed, trembling, to George. The poor dear looked as frightened and despairing as if George had told her he was running away with another woman and had tried to kill her.

"Don't try to talk," I comforted her. "We'll get Dr. Hudson right away."

She shook her head. Her arm pointed to George. She seemed to be using it as a shield to hold him off. Ah, well, we never want our loved ones to see us in the ugliness of sickness.

"Don't worry, dear," I assured her. "I'll look after George for you."

A groan came out of her holding all the grief in the world. Again the arm pointed. "George," she choked out. "George!"

Suddenly her head fell back, her arm dropped, and her eyes turned up. "Ga," she said. "Ga. Ga ga ga. Ga."

George stood back, his face as white as Lillian's hair. The man looked scared to death.

"Call the doctor. It's another stroke," I told him. "This is the way Dada went."

George got to the phone quickly. Lillian was still trying desperately to talk when the doctor arrived. Tears flowed from her like a fountain. "Ga," she greeted the doctor; and "Ga," she said when the ambulance arrived.

George and I followed the ambulance to the hospital. Now that Lillian was speeding toward help, the feeling of panic should have subsided. But it didn't. It was in me stronger than ever, coming to me from Lillian.

George and I huddled together in the queer intimacy of the hospital corridor. The feeling of desperate need was there still. "Why were you in Lillian's room?" I asked. "What were you doing with the pillow?"

George was ashen. He wet his mouth several times before words came. He couldn't look at

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me for more than a second at a time. "I just—had a feeling," he stammered. "This feeling that something was wrong."

I nodded. "So did I."

He shot me a look of disbelief. "She was tangled in the bedclothes," he said, his voice getting stronger. "The pillow had gotten over her face somehow. I guess she was only half awake, couldn't breathe, and panicked."

Something in me screamed, No!

I wanted to believe he loved Lillian as I did, so much that he too had felt her panic through the closeness of love. But that panic feeling from Lillian kept coming through, as if she needed to tell me something desperately.

Quite suddenly the feeling stopped.

Then Dr. Hudson was back saying, "I'm afraid I have bad news," and tears started to my eyes.

"She's dead?"

Dr. Hudson laid his hand on my shoulder. "I think she might have pulled through," he said, "but she just seemed to lose the will to live."

It was as if a sword had just split me in two. I turned to George, unable to contain the feeling of loss.

George was smiling.

Not the blank stupid smile of bereavement uncomprehended, but the smile of a slyboots getting away with something. A slimy smile, full of satisfaction.

Suddenly I knew what Lillian had been trying to tell me.

"You!" I screamed. "It was you! It was you!" My arm was pointing to him just as Lillian's had, my voice shaking, my whole body heaving. Shriek after shriek rang down the corridors. "Lillian! Lillian!"

George backing off. Dr. Hudson with a needle.

"You won't get away with it!" I shouted. The doctor was saying, "Easy, now." Fog closed in. "Keep her overnight," he murmured . . . "Heart not that good. Terrific shock." Then blankness . . .

I was in the dream again with all of us on the beach. Only this time, instead of clamming, they were just sitting, Lillian among them.

"George killed you," I said. Lillian nodded. She smiled. "It's all right, Hattie."

They just sat. "What are you doing?" I asked.

They all answered, "Waiting."

"For what?"

Lillian gave me her sweetest smile. "For George" . . .

I fell into a kind of drugged sleep silvered with grief. When I woke Dr. Hudson was watching me. "How are we feeling?"

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"I don't know about you," I said with some difficulty, "but I'll do." Indeed I would. I meant to bring George to justice if it took the rest of my life.

The doctor took my pulse and pulled a face. "Hattie, do you eat clams often?"

"Often enough." I couldn't understand what he was getting at. "We used to dig them up from our beach, but now that I'm older I buy them." Then I remembered George. "My brother-in-law dug some up yesterday. We never got around to eating them. Poor Lillian—" My voice thickened with loss. The doctor patted my hand. "I washed them, but we never even tasted them."

"Good thing, too," he said. "Didn't you know the clam flats were closed down yesterday? All the way from Ipswich to Maine. There was a notice in the newspaper."

I felt as if his voice was coming to me through a cloud. My eyelids kept drooping. "I didn't see the paper yesterday."

"Pollution," the doctor said. "Paralytic shellfish poisoning. It can cause death in a few hours from respiratory paralysis." He shook his head gravely. "There's no known cure."

All this hemming and hawing was so unlike the doctor that I asked, "What are you trying to tell me?"

He sighed. "Your brother-in-law was brought into emergency an hour ago. Shellfish poisoning. We tried to save him, but it was too late."

I could feel myself smiling into a thickening cloud. "He's dead?"

The doctor nodded. *Beyond the cloud Lillian was waiting. Eagerly. Her age had melded into the freshness of youth.*

All those dozens of clams George had dug and I had washed! Poor George, he never could leave anything for another time; he always had to finish every bite of food in sight.

Beyond Lillian I could just make out Dada and the boys. They looked quite severe. Like men with a score to settle.

"Think of it as a joyful reunion," the doctor suggested.

Dada's face swam quite close. Oh, wait for me! I cried.

We'll wait, Dada said. You're the chief witness.

Dr. Hudson's voice said, "Hattie?" quite sharply. He sounded very far away. "I was afraid of this. Her heart—"

All my grief subsided. Mist from the cloud drifted over me, pulling me gently into a delightful sleep . . . *into the place where Dada and Mama and Lillian and the boys were finished waiting at last.*

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a *NEW* Corrector-of-Destinies story by

EDWARD WELLEN

A lifer in prison—the new kind of detective who made his debut in our June 1974 issue. With this new story the behind-bars sleuth becomes officially a series detective . . . Number 10901 was up for Number One. Only the Man of Last Resort could help him . . .

THE TIPOFF

by EDWARD WELLEN

At the sudden looming of shadow over my own and that of the rosebush I was tending, I dug the toe of my shoe into the soil to get purchase for an upward and sideways thrust and slid my hand nearer the pruning shears. Some of these young hardrocks try to score points by beating up on older and weaker men.

But it was Number 10901 and he didn't have menace in his bearing or the look of frightened hate in his face. My nod of reserved welcome triggered a burst of words.

"Okay if I talk to you now?"

"I don't have office hours, if that's what you mean. Now's as good a time as any." I patted the ground. "You might get down and help me weed this plot while we talk. That should keep the screws happy."

He squatted beside me and plucked a few blades of grass. I stopped him before he got to the shoots of my best bulbs.

"That's enough. That's enough. You don't have to do any real weeding. Just hunker there and tell me about yourself." I knew something about him already. A city fella.

From the prison grapevine I knew something else about him. They had sent him up for Murder One. To me he didn't look like a murderer. But then most murderers don't show the mark of Cain. I've looked in the mirror.

To me he looked like somebody worth helping. Or somebody at least worth listening to.

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Even the most hopeless cases are grateful for the loan of an ear. And even the worst bores are worth listening to.

But I could see he wasn't going to be a bore. He got down to cases—his case—right away.

"They sent me up for killing a guy named Alan Seymore."

I watched his hands without seeming to. "Did you kill him?"

His hands clenched, then opened and hung loose. "No."

The shine of sweat didn't show on his palms, so maybe he was telling the truth. But then I don't go for the infallibility of any kind of lie detector.

"But twelve good persons and true thought you did. Why?"

His face twitched but he met my gaze. "Circumstantial evidence. No one saw me shoot Seymore because I didn't shoot him. But the night he got it was the night of the day my girl, Rhoda Meer, and I broke up. And so that was the night I got good and drunk and left myself wide-open for a frame. Rhoda and I broke up because she was seeing this Seymore."

His hands clenched again, then again hung loose. "The cops found me in a drunken stupor in my car and they found the murder gun in the glove compartment."

"Who would've wanted to frame you? Rhoda?"

"Oh, no." His eyes flashed, then flickered and dimmed. A brownout, a sudden overload on the thinking circuit. Then his eyes burned steady. "No."

"But if you're telling the truth—and we'll stipulate you think you are—it must have been a frame. I ask you again: who would have wanted to frame you?"

He gave a short laugh out of long bitterness. "Don't think I haven't thought about that. That's been my main job ever since they picked me up for it. The only other person I know of with an itch to scratch Seymore was Nick Fennick."

"What was his motive? Rhoda again?"

"No, no. Fennick was—I guess still is—a crooked politician. He was under grand jury investigation and Alan Seymore was one of the two or three people closest to Fennick who knew enough about Fennick to send him to jail. Fennick was worried green that one of these people would talk. And, sure enough, word got out that the grand jury had a secret witness ready to spill all the dirt on Fennick.

"Naturally, Fennick would want to know who that secret witness was. Kind of man Fennick was—is—he wouldn't think twice about shutting the secret witness up for good. From the way Fennick was al-

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ways one step ahead of the prosecutor it was clear he had a contact in the prosecutor's office.

"The prosecutor realized this and tried to plug the leak by putting a tap on Fennick's phone. In turn, the contact in the prosecutor's office had to know this tap was in place. I don't know if the informant had time to warn Fennick about the tap or if Fennick was simply smart enough to expect it. Whichever, from the time the tap was in place Fennick never once answered his phone.

"The bad thing for me was that the name of the secret witness wasn't available to Fennick's informant till after the tap was in place. And that was Fennick's ace in the hole when they called him in after Seymore's death. They did bring Fennick in for questioning even though they had me cold, because it turned out Seymore was to have been the secret witness and the cops thought Fennick just might've paid me to do the job—the jealousy angle being just a way of getting the jury's sympathy in case I got caught."

Number 10901 snorted. "The jury's sympathy! Anyway, Fennick's lawyer forced the prosecutor to admit there was a tap and to produce the tapes. All you heard was the phone ringing, because Fennick never once picked it up. The lawyer even subpoenaed the guys with the earphones and they had to admit that all the time Fennick was home he never answered his phone when it rang. So how *could* he have known Seymore was the man he had to kill? On the night Seymore died Fennick did go out at about ten o'clock and they tailed him but lost him for about fifteen minutes.

"In those fifteen minutes he could've done it—but only if he already knew for sure Seymore was the one and headed straight for Seymore's place. But they couldn't figure out how he might've learned Seymore was the one and they didn't try too hard to follow up on that angle."

He shrugged. "Why should they? They had me and the jealousy angle. And, as I said, there I was, practically on the scene, with the murder weapon in my possession, and no alibi."

"You say they found you in a drunken stupor in your car and they found the murder weapon in the glove compartment. Just where was your car?"

He flushed. "Parked right outside Seymore's apartment building. I had followed Rhoda there, though I made sure she didn't know I was tailing her." He grimaced. "She found out later, at the trial, and before

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that in the papers. Anyway, after she went up to Seymore's apartment I sat in my car with a fifth of gin and began to polish it off. After about a half hour I saw the light go out in his apartment. And not long after that *I* went out. Must've passed out about eight. Didn't even see Rhoda leave."

"Maybe when she left *she* saw *you*. Maybe she had a fight with Seymore, shot him, ran out, spotted you, and set you up for the fall."

He smiled and shook his head. "Funny, you know, but I don't think I'd mind, feeling the way I do about Rhoda, if that's what happened. But it didn't happen. The cab driver who picked Rhoda up at Seymore's building at 9:10 had the time down on his sheet and he remembered that a guy answering Seymore's description saw Rhoda into the cab and then went back into the building."

"All right. If it wasn't you and it wasn't Rhoda, then unless you can come up with someone else having motive and opportunity it has to be Fennick."

I began to dig a hole with a trowel. His eyes were empty as holes.

"Fennick's the most likely suspect—aside from myself—and I'd love for it to be Fennick. But I have to face the fact that the only way he could've known for sure Seymore was the secret witness against him was if his source in the prosecutor's office gave him the word. But Fennick had holed up in his secluded country place to get away from reporters and the only way his source could've tipped him off was by phone—and Fennick never answered the phone."

I straightened carefully and sat back on my heels. "He never answered. That doesn't mean he didn't listen."

Number 10901 stared at me, then spoke numbly. "Yes, I know. I don't think I could've stood it myself, hearing the phone ring and not picking it up. I don't know what it is about a phone, but whenever it rings you feel you have to answer it. Only thing was, Fennick knew his line was bugged and he wasn't about to let the buggers listen in on anything."

I gazed at the sky above the walls. "I remember one time when I was waiting to board a Greyhound bus—it's hard to believe but I *was* outside once—I heard one of an elderly couple tell a departing younger couple, 'Now, when you get home safe, don't forget the three rings.' And the younger couple said, 'We won't.' So you see, there's a way to beat Ma Bell out of a toll call. I think we might have

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just the same sort of ripoff here. Not to save money, though. To fool the tap. The point is, the ringing of an unanswered phone can convey a message. What was the murder victim's name? I know 'Seymore,' and I think you told me the first name but I forget."

"Alan."

I thought a minute. "'Alan.' Yes. Listen. The tipster would dial Fennick's number and let the phone ring however many rings he or she wanted, then hang up. Then dial and let it ring again, spelling out the name. One ring for A, two for B, three for C, and so on.

"We'll subpoena the tapes of the tap, and it will surprise me if there isn't a one-twelve-one-fourteen sequence of unanswered rings. I'm betting that the message got through to Fennick that A-L-A-N was the secret witness against him, the man he had to silence. Did you and Fennick know each other?"

It took him a moment to find his voice. "A nodding acquaintance. A condescending nod on his part. I guess he'd heard about Rhoda, Seymore, and me."

"Fits in. Way I read it, Fennick, once he has the name of the secret witness, gives his surveillance the slip, heads straight for Seymore's place, shoots Seymore. When he comes out something draws his attention to you. Maybe you shift position, maybe you flop an arm. Anyway, he spots movement in the car and possibly even recognizes the car. He goes over to get rid of an awkward witness and finds you dead drunk. No coincidence your being there. He knows you're jealous of Seymore. Best place in the world to ditch the gun. The perfect frame."

I smiled. "It would be interesting to see how he handles himself when the whole case reopens and the picture in the frame changes."

The hole I was digging seemed deep enough. I shoved myself to my feet. I didn't look at Number 10901. I could tell he was too full of emotion. I walked over to the wheelbarrow, stooped to the load of plants, and, careful of the earth ball, picked up the *Agave americana* I was transplanting.

Number 10901 tried to repay me by taking an interest in what I was doing, though of course his mind was rushing away outside the walls. He watched me lower the plant into the hole. "What's that one?"

I set it firmly in place. "Century plant." I knew we were both thinking I'd live to see it bloom inside these walls unless I found the answer to my own case the way I had to his.

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a *NEW* short story by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Something unusual from Lawrence Treat—as different from his police-procedural stories as can possibly be imagined . . . The evocation of a character you may never quite forget and of a way of life that may pass but may never be quite forgotten . . .

THE CANDLE FLAME

by LAWRENCE TREAT

In all the times I've seen her I think she never smiled. Or showed anger.

She arrived at the back door on that hot sultry day when everybody with any sense was cooling off at the lake. She was wearing a long red-velvet skirt that swept a broad swath in the sandy path to the cottage. Her embroidered bodice was a fine example of nomadic art, and her flowing costume could have held three of her. It seemed impossible that her frail flat-chested body could support the weight of that heavy velvet and those strings of beads.

"Yes?" I said. "You wanted something?"

For the few seconds before she replied, she gazed at me, and even now it is hard to describe her eyes. They were blue, they were white, they were colorless, and they seemed unable to blink or change expression. They were a child's eyes—porcelain eyes, with no appearance of depth.

"I heard you were looking for somebody to clean house," she said.

"Right. But my wife is down at the lake. She'll be back around six."

"Could I see the house first?" she said.

"Sure. My studio's separate. I take care of it myself, so there's just the living room-kitchen that you're looking at and a couple of small bedrooms. Not very much. It's nothing but a summer shack."

"I know," she said. She moved forward and appeared to study the room. "When were

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you born?" she asked.

It was a peculiar question, and later it occurred to me that it was even more peculiar that I answered it. "Nineteen thirty," I said.

"No. I mean what date?"

"September," I said. "The fourteenth."

"Libra," she said. Then she walked forward and touched the paperweight on my desk. "That's why you have the sardonyx," she said. "It's your birthstone. And your wife? When was she born?"

"Same month as I was, but on the seventh."

"I'm a Virgo," she said, "so there won't be any problem. Just so you're not Scorpio."

She seemed about to leave, but before making up her mind she took a last look at the room and saw the sketch I'd made that morning. It was a quick drawing, only half finished, of a young girl. She picked it up and gazed at it rapturously.

"Oh, I *like* that!" she exclaimed. "It's *me!*" And she clasped it to her meager bosom. "May I borrow it? I have to be with it for a while."

"Of course," I said, flattered by her enthusiasm and watching her hug it, carrying it as she would a sleeping infant.

She seemed embarrassed, and she turned and looked at me with those pale innocent eyes.

"I have to go to The Area," she said, as if she hated the necessity of explaining, "but you don't have to take me there unless you want to."

"Glad to," I said. "No trouble at all." And I felt noble and virtuous at giving her a ride.

I don't know when people first started calling that grassy peninsula "The Area." It had acquired the name long before Gerda and I had started coming to the lake, and by immemorial custom it was reserved for nude bathing. Nobody was sure who owned it. I tried once to check the title on the tax records and found that theoretically it didn't even exist. Perhaps that was why the police, otherwise so strict in petty law-enforcement, stayed away from The Area.

When I returned to the house, Gerda was changing from her bathing suit, and I told her about the apparition that was due to work for us.

"What's her name?" Gerda asked.

"Amanda Pyle. She has strange, light-colored eyes, and her hair is blonde-red, something like a pink grapefruit."

"What a romantic image!" Gerda said.

I had to go to town shortly before six, and when I returned to the house I saw Martin Deming's beat-up bug parked

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nearby. I recognized his car by the variety of oversized flower decals that decorated its pock-marked hide. I pulled up alongside.

"Hi," I said. "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for Amanda," he answered. "It seems she's decided to work for you."

"We certainly need her. Ever since Gerda hurt her arm, she's been desperate for somebody to help out."

"That's why Amanda came," Martin said.

That stopped me. Gerda needs someone, and Amanda divines or intuits or telepathizes, and comes to the rescue. Which was ridiculous.

"Oh," I said. "You mean somebody told Amanda about Gerda's arm and that she needed a housecleaner?"

"Well," Martin said. "I suppose so."

I felt stupid and wanted to apologize or change the subject and get back to normal. "Been waiting long?" I said.

"Ten or fifteen minutes."

"Why not have a swim with me?" I said. "I'm going to have a quick dip before dinner."

"I can't swim," Martin said.

"You? A big guy like you? How come?"

Martin gave me a sheepish grin. "Makes me unique," he said. "Everybody else swims, I don't." Then, becoming serious, he said, "When I was a kid I almost drowned, and I've been scared of the water ever since."

"Don't worry," I said. "You'll get over that. Maybe Amanda can manage it."

"I guess she will, eventually," he said. Which was a commonplace remark, and yet at the time I had the feeling that Martin meant she'd perform some kind of hocus-pocus, that she'd tell him he was no longer afraid of the water and could swim, and her saying so would make it so.

"Mmm. Well, I'd better bring my packages in."

Gerda told me later on that Amanda had walked into the house, tilted her head to one side while she studied Gerda, and announced that it was all right for her to work for Gerda.

"Just like that?" I said. "She told you she was going to work for you? She didn't wait to be asked?"

"I wanted somebody and she looked clean, so why wouldn't I give her a try?"

"Just like that?" I said again.

"Well, she said I had the right vibes—vibrations, I guess—so we went on to other things."

They were on the "other things" when I arrived. They were discussing when it was best to eat fiddleback ferns and

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whether purslane should be creamed or merely sautéed. It was clear that they were kindred souls, even to the point of finance.

I heard the bargain being made. Amanda was about to leave when Gerda mentioned money. "I forgot to ask you how much you want. I suppose three dollars an hour, like everybody else."

Amanda objected. "Oh, no. I couldn't take more than two. Two is Yin and Yang, and three would be triad."

Gerda looked surprised, but she recovered quickly. "Oh, yes," she said. "That will be all right."

I quote the exact conversation, to prove that there was nothing sinister. Nothing.

I was in my studio the following morning when Amanda arrived, and I didn't see her until I came into the house for my second cup of coffee. She was standing at the sink. Despite the bright sunlight a lighted candle was burning on either side of her. She was using my favorite egg cups as holders, and she was slowly washing a coffee cup in a basin of water. Later on, when Gerda and I redid the dishes, she told me Amanda had put a white lily in the basin instead of soap suds.

"It was quite beautiful," Gerda said.

At the time, however, I was overwhelmed by the sight of Amanda and her candles. "What!" I exclaimed. "What the—"

But Gerda put her finger to her lips and murmured a "Shh!" Amanda appeared not to hear. I think she was in a trance.

At lunch, after Amanda had left, I asked Gerda how things had worked out. "Well," Gerda said, "she did about ten cents' worth of work. Not much more."

"Did you complain?"

"In a way. She said she'd do better next time."

She did. Or at least Martin did. He brought her to the house and came in with her. "Martin is going to help me," Amanda announced. "It won't cost extra, he'll do a couple of things."

What he did was wash the kitchen floor, run the vacuum cleaner, sweep and clean the porch, and shake out the rugs.

"Twenty dollars' worth of work, easily," Gerda told me.

The next time, however, Amanda came alone. Perhaps in apology for her incompetence, she presented us with a loaf of health bread that she'd baked.

At almost every visit she brought something wild that she'd made or gathered, and

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she spent the first half hour or so, at our expense, telling Gerda how to prepare it. As the result, I found myself drinking sumac tea, eating pig weed or lamb's quarters, and having wild sorrel salads and soups. Once Amanda arrived with a basket of mushrooms, and Gerda and I were shocked to see a couple of amanitas mixed in with some edible species.

"Amanda!" Gerda said. "Throw them out. Those white ones—they're a deadly poison."

"I know," Amanda said serenely. "I wasn't going to eat those. White is wrong."

"Amanitas," Gerda said sternly, "are poisonous."

"I'm careful," Amanda said, "and I know where to look. The ones that grow in circles are good to eat, and so are the ones that grow in clusters, but when they're alone and dressed in white they represent pride and vanity. I wouldn't dream of eating them."

"That's nonsense," Gerda said firmly. "Inedible ones can also grow in circles and clusters. That's no way to identify. You have to know a mushroom the way you know an aster or a rose."

Amanda didn't answer, and I'm not even sure she listened.

After a few weeks Gerda's arm had regained its normal strength, but it was not in her nature to fire anybody, particularly someone like Amanda.

"We're friends," Gerda said. "She tells me all kinds of things. How she came to the lake, for instance. She was in a commune, and she was on her way to town one day when Martin's name popped into her mind. She knew him from some yoga classes that they'd both gone to, and they'd kept up with each other in a vague sort of way. When she got back to the commune, she found out that Martin had phoned her, so she called him and he said to come up here. Naturally she did."

"Naturally," I said.

She worked for us on Mondays and Fridays. Sometimes she brought Martin, and when she did he polished up the house until it was spic and span. Otherwise she left behind her a faint scent of incense, a couple of burnt-out candles, and a stack of dishes to be rewashed. We were therefore surprised to see her arrive one Tuesday morning.

"Bob's coming," she said, "and I need money to buy him a present. Shall I start in the bathroom?"

"That will be fine," Gerda said. "Who's Bob?"

Amanda went to the refrigerator and took out an egg and some of her barley bread

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for breakfast. "He's very special," she said. "He's coming from California and I have to fix the room for him."

"What about Martin?" Gerda asked.

"Oh, Martin will understand. Bob's special, you see. He's been to India and he studied under the Master." From the way she spoke you could tell that Master was spelled with a capital M. "Bob has Power." And that was spelled with a capital P.

"Amanda," Gerda said, "I don't like to interfere, but I'm a little older than you are, and I'd like to give you some advice. Martin's been sweet to you, he's helped you and he's been a good friend and you have certain obligations towards him, so it's not fair to push him out and take somebody else, just like that."

"I'm not pushing him out," Amanda said. "I wouldn't dream of such a thing."

"Do they know each other?" Gerda said.

"They know each other through me. I think of both of them at the same time, and in utter harmony."

"But when they see each other, maybe there won't be quite that much harmony. Thinking doesn't always make things so."

Amanda turned slowly and fixed Gerda with her pale eyes. "I'd do anything that either of them asked me to," she said. "We're unity. We're not external, we're internal." Then she ate the egg and barley bread.

Later, after she'd meditated in the bathroom and then left with her $4 and breakfast on us, I teed off on Gerda.

"That little chit conned us," I said. "What did she do for her four dollars? What does she think we are?"

"She thinks we're lost in desire. She's a little sorry for us, and she uses us."

"I don't like to be used. I'm not a usee."

"Neither am I, but I'm learning things. Peter, what do you know about communes and long-hairs and acid freaks? What do you know about Amanda's young world?"

"I know plenty about her generation. First it went in for love and then it was acid and then the Jesus freaks and now I guess it's something else. These kids are looking for something. Sure. They haven't found it and I don't think they're on the right track, but they're having a hell of a good time and I'm glad they are, because by and by they'll settle down and have children and be good citizens and read the classics, just like you and me."

"You're old-fashioned," Gerda

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said, "and you're jealous of people like Amanda, and so am I. I envy Amanda and her two men, although I don't think it will work out, and that's why I said what I did. But deep down, Peter, I hope she gives it a try."

"If she does," I said, "it's going to be murder for one of them."

"Literally?"

"Of course not. They're gentle people. Amanda is one of the kindest and gentlest people I've ever met. But look at the way she leads Martin around. And us."

"You're sarcastic," Gerda said, "but wait and see."

"Martin's too nice a guy to be led around, and one of these days he'll see what's happening and he'll turn on her."

"And do what?" Gerda said. "Beat her up? Walk out on her? What?"

"I don't know. All I'm saying is that there's a limit. She puts things over on people, she does it all the time. Take yourself, for instance—has she ever really cleaned this place? Has she ever done a decent morning's work?"

"If she had," Gerda said, with her usual illogic, "my arm wouldn't have gotten better so fast. It's as if I had to cover up for her and my sprained arm was no excuse, so it had to get better and it did. All the things I've learned from her!" Gerda started laughing. "She's so pathetic that you feel sorry for her and you never realize what you've done until it's all over. Peter, how many pictures have you given her?"

"None," I said, grinning, "but she took two."

To nobody's surprise, neither mine nor Gerda's, Amanda failed to show up on her next cleaning day. "I guess that's the end of that," Gerda said. "No more ground-nuts or crowberries, and no more barley bread. From now on we'll have to go to the corner store and buy our food like everybody else."

"But we can't let her go," I said. "I'm too damn curious about what's happening with Martin and Amanda and this Bob guy. How about going down to The Area and looking for them?"

It was a long time since Gerda and I had been there, and the initial impact was strange, almost shocking. The flat grassy area was covered with dogs and naked bodies, small dogs and big dogs and thin bodies and fat bodies, lounging, sunning themselves, talking, or doing nothing. Two or three long-hairs were doing yoga exercises, and a small group was intent on watching a chess game. Some children were playing in the couple of

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feet of sand that had been imported long ago in an attempt to make a beach.

We found our threesome easily enough. They were lying in a circle, with their feet touching each other at the center. Martin, big and powerful, an athlete in perfect condition; Amanda, like a slender stick of flesh; and Bob, an undernourished little spider, all hair, hairy body and bushy beard with a stubby little nose poking out of it as if coming up for air. When I spoke, they sat up.

Amanda made a feint at introducing us. "This is Bob," she said.

"I've heard of you," I said.

Bob's squeaky voice surprised me. "Many have," he said.

Gerda tried to break the embarrassment by discussing edible wild plants with Amanda, but Bob's treble cut her off.

"Let's not talk about food," he said. "This is our day of fasting."

"Amanda fasting?" Gerda said. "She needs all the nourishment she can get. Just look at her."

"Her nourishment is of the spirit," Bob said. "She has a calm center."

I coughed. Gerda said, "Well, well!" Martin looked uncomfortable, and then pandemonium broke loose in the form of a dog fight.

They were big dogs, a German shepherd and a Doberman pinscher, and they battled in a snarling whirlwind of fury. Everybody near them jumped and ran off shrieking, except for a couple of brave young guys, probably the owners, who tried gingerly and ineffectually to separate them.

I grabbed Gerda's hand, ready, in case the tornado came our way, to pull her behind me in a gesture of protection. Bob, however, climbed to his feet, rising slowly, using some trick of elongating himself so that he seemed tall, despite the fact that he barely topped my shoulder. I was amazed to see him walk deliberately toward that whirling ball of canine destruction.

He was nude and unprotected against claws and teeth, while a pair of enraged animals were snapping and biting at each other and anybody near them. But Bob walked straight up to them, held out his hands, and said something no one could hear. Maybe he spoke, maybe he whistled, or maybe he exuded some power of silencing. In any case, the dogs stopped abruptly, withdrew, then faced each other growling. Bob held out his two hands and each of the dogs crept up to him, tails between their legs, and licked his outstretched fingers.

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For a moment there was silence. Then you could hear the rising babble of astonishment, and a few sentences carried to where we stood—words of admiration, almost of awe.

Bob paid no attention to anyone. He said something to the dogs in a low voice, and they did not follow as he returned to us.

"That was wonderful," Gerda said. "What did you say to them?"

Bob didn't deign to reply. He reached out for Amanda's hand. "Let's go for a dip," he said.

She followed obediently, and we watched them walk toward the water, walking slowly until they reached the edge, where they seemed to explode and go splashing in. Martin gazed at them sadly.

"Does he do that kind of thing often?" I said. "Pull miracles, that is?"

"No, that's the first time I've seen anything like that."

"It's going to be tough on you," I said. "From now on he's a hero, whereas you—" I didn't finish the sentence.

"He's not a hero," Martin said. "You need an awful lot of ego to be a hero."

"You think he has none?" I said. "I think he has nothing but."

Martin shrugged. I felt that he agreed with me, but was afraid to say so. The subject seemed to be unpleasant to him, so I switched.

"Why don't you learn how to swim?" I said. "You're a good athlete, it ought to be easy for you."

"Amanda said she'd teach me when she thinks I'm ready for it."

"You'll be ready as soon as you try," I said. "How can *she* know when you're ready?"

"Don't," Martin said.

Don't talk about it any more? Don't destroy my confidence in Amanda and her way of life? Don't make problems for me? Don't—what?

We saw the three of them in town later that week. They were barefoot. Amanda was walking in the center, and her light cloak was thrown around both her escorts. It circled Bob's narrow shoulders and made him and Amanda as one, but on Martin's side the cloak was too short and too small to cover him, so it hung precariously from Martin's midriff and threatened to fall off at every step.

"Yin and Yang," I said to Gerda, "and three would be triad. I wonder whether she'd work for three bucks an hour now, if you offered it."

"Martin will leave her," Gerda said. "He has too much sense not to. He'll find himself

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a good healthy wench to love him, and he'll love her in turn."

"Sure," I said. "To the end of his days."

We were wrong.

The first we heard of the event was from one of our neighbors, who phoned to find out if we knew. Gerda answered the phone, and the shock in her voice made me gasp.

"What!" she exclaimed. "Martin? Oh, no! Not Martin. What happened?" She listened for a minute or so, then put the phone down gently. "Martin drowned," she said to me. "He went rowing with Amanda, and he fell out of the boat and drowned."

"But he was so scared of the water," I said. "What made him go? And how do you fall out of a boat? Only fools stand up, and Martin was no fool."

"You think not?" Gerda said. "You kept saying he was. Remember?"

The full account appeared in the local paper. It said that Martin Fuller, 22 years old and a part-time carpenter, had been drowned in a tragic accident. According to Miss Amanda Pyle, who had been with him, he had stood up in the boat, for reasons she was unable to explain. He either lost his balance or became dizzy, and he toppled and knocked over the oars in his fall.

Mr. Fuller, the story continued, weighed about 200 pounds and Miss Pyle barely half of that. It was obviously beyond her strength to dive in and rescue him, and it was all she could do to paddle the boat with her hands and reach the floating oars. By that time it was too late for her to do anything to help Mr. Fuller. She rowed ashore and notified the first people she saw, who called the police. The body was recovered several hours later.

Amanda came to work for us the following Thursday. She seemed calm and collected, and at first she made no mention of the tragedy. She had a wreath of daisies in her hair. She removed the wreath ceremoniously and placed it on one of the two towels she took from the linen closet. She took the other towel into the bathroom, and presently we heard the shower going.

"What the hell is she doing in there?" I said to Gloria.

"Apparently she's taking a shower," Gerda said acidly. "But don't ask her any questions for a while. If she doesn't tell me anything, I'll ask later on."

"I don't like it," I said. "The least she ought to do is look sad and tell us about Martin. But she's so calm and quiet."

"Wait and see," Gerda said.

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I waited patiently while Amanda came out of the bathroom, found two candles, and set them up on either side of the sink. She put them in my egg cups, as she always did, then lit the candles and went through her usual vague motions of washing. This time, however, it was all too much for me to take, and I marched over to the sink and blew out the candles.

"In case you're wondering why I did that," I said, "those are my egg cups, and I like to use them as such."

"I'm sorry," Amanda said meekly. "But when you're with a candle flame, you are the candle flame."

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"I hoped you'd understand," she said. "You're upset about Martin, aren't you?"

"You bet I am."

"You don't have to be," she said. "He's no longer lost in the darkness. He's part of us now."

Gerda interrupted what might have become a rather nasty and probably futile interrogation by me. "Amanda," she said gently, "tell us what happened."

"It was wonderful," Amanda said. "Martin finally conquered his fear of water, and with it he conquered all fear. He *asked* me to go rowing with him, and when we were in the center of the lake he said he was no longer afraid of the water, and he stood up in the boat and he was smiling. When he swayed, I tried to reach out to support him and keep him from falling, but there was a force between us. There was an energy that kept me from reaching out, and suddenly I knew that his time had come, this was his kârma, and I was privileged to be there at the time. I was so happy!"

"Happy?" I exclaimed. "When he's dead?"

"You don't understand," Amanda said. "You're like the police. They didn't understand either. They kept asking me whether I'd pushed him."

"Did you?" I said.

"I can't stay here when people keep thinking that. Don't you see, Martin and I were one. For a wonderful instant we were joined as can only rarely happen between people. We found ourselves in a perfect circle."

"And now you're leaving The Area?" I said.

"Yes."

"With Bob?"

"Oh, no. With a friend of mine. You don't know him, but he's Gemini, and Bob, while he's wonderful, he's Pisces. So you see, Bob couldn't go with me."

"Well, I hope it works out," I

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said, "and that the tragedy—"

"Please, don't call it a tragedy. It was the way of life, it was good that it happened and good that it happened with me. Some other people might have tried to interfere." Her pale eyes gazed upward, where police and other unbelievers like myself couldn't possibly reach her.

"Tell me just one thing more," I said. "Why did he stand up?"

"Because I wanted him to."

"Oh," I said.

I watched Amanda cross the room and take the daisy wreath from the towel on which she'd placed it when she'd come in. She adjusted the wreath carefully and then she left, with her long velvet skirt trailing along the path. She did not look back.

As soon as she was out of sight, I walked over to the towel and examined it. Her wreath had left a faint, light-colored ring that seemed to give off tiny shafts of light.

"It looks like a halo," I said, dumfounded.

Gerda smiled. "Yes," she said. "Didn't you see her draw it?"

"Sure," I said sarcastically. Then I went over and touched the wet towel, and the yellow pollen came off on my fingers.

"Halo?" I said. "Halo?"

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a NEW Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Ralph Murdock is a somber, melancholy elder of the Church of the Disciples of Holiness, a man who does not smoke, drink, swear, or gamble, whose lifestyle is straitlaced and who describes himself as "a sour Puritan who finds a perverse pleasure in gloom." It is he who brings to the Black Widowers as baffling and tantalizing a riddle as you've heard in a year of monthly meetings . . .

THE ONE AND ONLY EAST

by ISAAC ASIMOV

Artist Mario Gonzalo, host of the month's Black Widowers banquet, was resplendent in a scarlet blazer; nevertheless he looked a little disconsolate.

He said in a low voice to Geoffrey Avalon, the patent attorney, "He's sort of a deadhead, Jeff, but he's got an interesting problem. He's my landlady's cousin and we were talking about it and I thought, well, what the hell, it could be interesting."

Avalon, on his first drink, bent his dark brows disapprovingly and said, "Is he a priest?"

"No," said Gonzalo, "not a Catholic priest. I think what you call him is 'elder.' He's a member of some small uptight sect. Which reminds me that I had better ask Tom to go a little easy on his language."

Avalon's frown remained. "You know, Mario, if you invite a man solely on the basis of his problem, and without any personal knowledge of him whatever, you could be letting us in for a very sticky evening. Does he drink?"

"I guess not," said Mario. "He asked for tomato juice."

"Does that mean *we* don't drink?" Avalon took an unaccustomedly vigorous sip.

"Of course we drink."

"You're the host, Mario—but I suspect the worst."

The guest, standing against the wall, was dressed in somber

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black and wore a mournful expression which may have been merely the result of the natural downward slant of the outer corners of his eyes. His face almost glistened with a recent close shave and bore a pallor that may merely have been the contrast with his dark clothes. His name was Ralph Murdock.

Emmanuel Rubin, the writer, his spectacle-magnified eyes glaring and his sparse beard vibrating with the energy of his speech, had taken the measure of the man at once and had managed to maneuver the discussion into a sharp analysis of the nature of the Trinity.

Murdock seemed unmoved and his face remained as calm as that of Henry, the club waiter, who performed his functions as imperturbably as ever.

"The mistake," said Murdock, "usually made by those who discuss the mysteries in terms of ordinary logic is to suppose that the rules that originate from observation of the world of sense impression apply to the wider universe beyond. To some extent, they may, but how can we know where and how they do not?"

Rubin said, "That's an evasion."

"It is not," said Murdock. "Within the realm of reason, science has advanced steadily and today many things are routine that three centuries ago would have seemed impossible."

Rubin said, "Then you think that further advance in beyond-reason may yet make the Trinity comprehensible."

"More possibly," said Murdock, "it already makes sense in advances in beyond-reason that took place long ago."

With open delight the others joined in the battle, everyone in opposition to Murdock, who seemed oblivious of the weight of the forces against him. With an unchanging expression of melancholy and with unmoved politeness, he answered them all without any sense of urgency or annoyance. It was all the more exciting in that it did not deal with matters that could be settled by reference to the club library.

Over the dessert Trumbull, the code expert, with a careful mildness of vocabulary that was belied by the ferocious wrinkling of his tanned face, said, "Whatever you can say of reasoning, it has lengthened the average human life by some forty years in the last century. The forces beyond reason, whatever they may be, have been unable to lengthen it a minute."

Murdock said, "That reason has its uses and seeming benefit no one can deny. It has enabled us to live long, but look

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round the world, sir, and tell me whether it has enabled us to live decently. And ask yourself further whether length without decency is so unmixed a blessing."

By the time the brandy was served and the lances of all had been shivered against Murdock's calm verbal shield, it seemed almost anticlimactic to have Gonzalo strike his water glass with his spoon to mark the beginning of the postprandial grilling.

Gonzalo said, "Gentlemen, we have had an unusually interesting dinner, I think, and it seems to me that our guest has already been put through his hurdles. He has acquitted himself well and I think even Manny has suspicious signs of egg on his face. —Don't say anything, Manny. —As host, I am going to end the grilling and direct Mr. Murdock, if he will, to tell us his story."

Murdock, who had finished the dinner with a large glass of milk, and who had refused Henry's offer of coffee and brandy, began:

It was kind of Mr. Gonzalo to invite me to this dinner and I must say I have been pleased with the courtesy extended me. I am grateful as well. It is not often I have a chance to discuss matters with unbelievers who are as ready to listen as yourselves. I doubt that I have convinced any of you, but it is by no means my mission to convince you—rather to offer you an opportunity to convince yourselves.

My problem, or "story" as Mr. Gonzalo has called it, has preyed on my mind these recent weeks. I have confided some of it, in a moment of agony of mind, to Sister Minerva, who is, by the reckoning of the world, a cousin of mine, but a sister by virtue of a common membership in our Church of the Disciples of Holiness. She, for reasons that seemed worthwhile to herself, mentioned it to her tenant, Mr. Gonzalo, and he sought me out and asked me to attend this meeting.

He assured me it was possible you might help me in this problem. You may or you may not; that does not matter. The kindness you have already shown me is great enough to make failure in the other matter something of little consequence.

Gentlemen, I am an elder of the Church of the Disciples of Holiness. It is a small church of no importance at all as the world counts importance, but the world's approval is not what we seek. Nor do we look for consolation in the thought that we alone will find salva-

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tion. We are perfectly ready to admit that all may find their way to the Throne by any of an infinite number of paths. We find comfort only in that our own path seems to us to be a direct and comfortable one, a path that gives us peace—a commodity as rare in the world as it is desirable.

I have been a member of the church since the age of 15 and have been instrumental in bringing into the fold several of my friends and relatives.

One whom I failed to interest was my Uncle Haskell.

It would be easy for me to describe my Uncle Haskell as a sinner but that word is usually used to describe offenses against God, and I consider that to be a useless definition. God's mercy is infinite and His love is great enough to find offense in nothing that applies to Himself only. If the offense were against man that would be far graver, but here I can exonerate my Uncle Haskell by at least the amount by which I can exonerate mankind generally. One cannot live a moment without in some way harming, damaging, or, at the very least, inconveniencing a fellowman; but I am sure my Uncle Haskell never intended such harm, damage, or inconvenience. He would have gone a mile out of his way to prevent this, if he knew what was happening and if prevention were possible.

There remains the third class of damage—that of a man against himself—and it was here, I am afraid, that my Uncle Haskell was a sinner. He was a large man, with a Homeric sense of humor and gargantuan appetites. He ate and drank to excess, and womanized as well; yet whatever he did, he did with such gusto that one could be deluded into believing he gained pleasure from his way of life, and fall into the error of excusing him on the grounds that it was far better to enjoy life than to be a sour Puritan such as myself who finds a perverse pleasure in gloom.

It was this, in fact, that was my Uncle Haskell's defense after I remonstrated with him on one occasion when what might have seemed to himself and to others to have been a glorious spree ended with him in jail and possessing a mild concussion to boot.

He said to me, "What do you know of life, you such-and-such Puritan. You don't drink, you don't smoke, you don't swear, you don't—"

Well, I will spare you the list of pleasures in which he found me lacking. You can, undoubtedly, imagine each and every one. It may seem sad to you,

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too, that I miss out on such routes to elevation of the spirit, but my Uncle Haskell, if he knew a dozen ladies of doubtful virtue, had never known the quiet heart-filling of love. He did not know the pleasurable serenity of quiet contemplation, of reasoned discourse, of communion with the great souls who have left their thoughts behind them. He knew my feelings in this respect but scorned them.

He may have done so the more vehemently because he knew what he had lost. While I was in college—in the days when I first came to know my Uncle Haskell and to love him—he was writing a dissertation on Restoration England. At times he spoke as though he were writing a novel, at times a historical exposition. He had a home in Leonia, New Jersey, then—still had, I should say, for he had been born there, as had his ancestors and mine back to the Quaker days in Colonial times. —Well, he lost it, along with everything else.

Now, where was I? —Yes, in his Leonia home, he had built up a library of material on Restoration England in which he found, I honestly believe, more pleasure than in any of the sensualities that eventually claimed him.

But it was his addiction to gambling that did the real damage. It was the first of his pleasure passions that he took to extremes. It cost him his home and his library. It cost him his work, both that in which he made his living as an antique dealer and that in which he found his joy as an amateur historian.

His sprees, however rowdily joyful, left him in the hospital, the jail, or the gutter, and I was not always there to extricate him.

What kept him going was the erratic nature of his chief vice, for occasionally he made some fortunate wager, or turned up a lucky card, and then, for a day or a month, he would be well-to-do. At those times he was always generous. He never valued money for itself nor clung to it in the face of another's need—which would have been a worse vice than any he possessed—so that the good times never lasted long nor served as any base for the renewal of his former worthier life.

And, as it happened, toward the end of his life, he made the killing of a lifetime. I believe it is called a "killing," which is reasonable since the language of vice has a peculiar violence of its own. I do not pretend to understand how it was done, except that several horses, each

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unlikely to win, nevertheless won, and my Uncle Haskell so arranged his bets that each winning horse greatly multiplied what had already been multiplied.

He was left, both by his standards and mine, a wealthy man, but he was dying and knew he would not have time to spend the money in his usual fashion. What occurred to him, then, was to leave the world in the company of a huge joke—a joke in which the humor rested in what he conceived to be my corruption, though I'm sure he didn't look upon it that way.

He called me to his bedside and said to me something which, as nearly as I can remember, was this: "Now, Ralph, my boy, don't lecture me. You see for yourself that I am virtuous now. Lying here I can't do any of the terrible things you deplore—except perhaps to swear a little. I can only find time and occasion now to be as virtuous as you and my reward for that is to die.

"But I don't mind, Ralph, because I've got more money now than I've had at one time for many years and I will be able to throw it away in a new fashion. I am willing it to you."

I began to protest that I preferred his health and his true reform to his money, but he cut me short.

"No, Ralph. In your twisted way, you have tried your best for me and have helped me even though you disapproved of me so strongly and could have no hope of a reasonable return in money or in conversion. On top of that you're my only relative and you should get the money even if you had done nothing at all for me."

Again I tried to explain that I had helped him as a human being and not as a relative, and that I had not done so as a kind of business investment; but again he cut me short. He was having difficulty speaking and I did not wish to prolong matters unduly.

He said, "I will leave you fifty thousand dollars, free and clear. Matters will be so arranged that all legal expenses and all taxation will be taken care of. I have already discussed this with my lawyer. With your way of life I don't know what you can possibly do with the money other than stare at it, but if that gives you pleasure I'll leave you to it."

I said gently, "Uncle Haskell, a great deal of good can be done with fifty thousand dollars and I will spend it in ways that the Disciples of Holiness will find fitting and useful. If this displeases you, then do not leave the money to me."

He laughed then, a feeble ef-

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fort, and fumbled for my hand in a way that made it clear how weak he had grown. I had not seen him for a year and in that interval he had gone downhill at an incredible pace.

The doctors said that a combination of diseases, treated inadequately, had advanced too rapidly across the bastions of his pleasure-riddled body, heaven help him, and had left him with nothing but the hope of a not-too-prolonged time of dying. It was on himself and the horse races that he had made a simultaneous killing.

He clutched my hand weakly and said, "No, do whatever you want with the money. Hire someone to sing psalms. Give it away, a penny at a time to five million bums. That's your business; I don't care. But, Ralph, there's a catch to all this, a very amusing catch."

"A catch? What kind of catch?"

"Why, Ralph, my boy, I'm afraid you will have to gamble for the money." He patted my hand and laughed again. "It will be a good straight gamble with the odds only six to one against you.

"My lawyer," he went on, "has a sealed envelope in which is written the name of a city—a nice sealed envelope which he won't open till you come to him with the name of a city. I will give you six cities to choose from and you will select one of these. One! If the city you choose matches the one in the envelope, you get the fifty thousand dollars. If it does not match, you get nothing, and the money will go to various charities. *My* kind of charities."

"This is not a decent thing to do, Uncle," I said, rather taken aback.

"Why not, Ralph? All you have to do is guess the city and you have a great deal of money. And if you guess wrong, you lose nothing. You can't ask for a better deal than that. My suggestion is that you number the cities from one to six, then roll a die and pick the city corresponding to the number you roll. A sporting chance, Ralph!"

His eyes seemed to glitter, perhaps at the picture of me rolling a die for money. I felt that sharply and I said, shaking my head, "Uncle Haskell, it is useless to place this condition on me. I will not play games with the Universe or abdicate the throne of conscience in order to allow chance to make my decisions for me. Either leave me the money, if that pleases you, or do not leave it, if *that* pleases you."

He said, "Why do you think of it as playing a game with the Universe? Don't you accept what men call chance to be re-

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ally God's will? You have said that often enough. Well, then, if he thinks you worthy, you will get the money. Or don't you trust Him?"

I said, "God is not a man that He may be put to the test."

My Uncle Haskell was growing feebler. He withdrew his arm and let it rest passively on the blanket. After a while he said, "Well, you'll have to. If you don't supply my lawyer with your choice within thirty days of my death, it will all go to my charities. Surely thirty days will give you enough time."

We all have our weaknesses, gentlemen, and I am not always free of pride. I could not allow myself to be forced to dance to my Uncle Haskell's piping merely to get the money. But then I thought that I could use the money—not for myself but for the church—and perhaps I had no right to throw it away out of pride in my own virtue, when so much would be lost in the process.

But pride won out. I said, "I'm sorry, Uncle Haskell, but in that case the money will have to go elsewhere. I will not gamble for it."

I rose to go but his hand motioned me not to turn away. He said, "All right, my miserable nephew. I want you to have the money, I really do. So if you lack sporting blood and can't take your honest chance with fate, I will give you one hint. If you penetrate it, you will know which city it is—beyond doubt—and you will not be gambling when you hand in that name."

I did not really wish to prolong the discussion and yet I hated to abandon him and leave him desolate if I could avoid doing so. I said, "What is this hint?"

He said, "You will find the answer in the one and only east—*the one and only east.*"

"The one and only east," I repeated. "Very well, Uncle Haskell, I will consider it. Now let us talk of other things."

I made as though to sit down again, but the nurse entered and said it was time for my Uncle Haskell to rest. And, indeed, I thought it was; he seemed worn to the last thread.

He said, "Saved a sermon, by the Almighty," and laughed in a whisper.

I said, "Goodbye, Uncle Haskell. I will come again."

When I reached the door he called out, "Don't jump to a conclusion too soon, nephew. Think it over carefully. *The one and only east.*"

That is the story, gentlemen. My uncle died twenty-seven days ago. Within three days, by this coming Monday, I must

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give my selection to the lawyer. I suspect I will not give that selection, for my Uncle Haskell's clue means nothing to me and I will not choose a city as a mere gamble. No, I will not.

There was a short silence after Murdock had finished his tale. James Drake, the organic chemist, puffed thoughtfully on his cigarette. Tom Trumbull scowled at his empty brandy glass and Roger Halsted, the teacher of mathematics, doodled on his napkin. Geoffrey Avalon sat bolt upright, looking blank, while Emmanuel Rubin shook his head slowly from side to side.

Gonzalo broke the silence uneasily, perhaps thinking it his duty to do so, as the host. He said, "Do you mind telling us the names of the six cities, Mr. Murdock?"

"Not at all, Mr. Gonzalo. Since you asked me to come here so that I might possibly be helped, and since I agreed to come—I obviously seek help. With that in view I must answer any honorable question. The names of the cities, as I received them from the lawyer on the day of my Uncle Haskell's death, are on this paper. You'll notice it is the lawyer's stationery. It is the paper he gave me."

He handed it to Gonzalo. Aside from the lawyer's letterhead, it contained only the typed list of six cities in alphabetical order:

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA
ATHENS, GEORGIA
AUGUSTA, MAINE
CANTON, OHIO
EASTON, PENNSYLVANIA
PERTH AMBOY, NEW JERSEY

Gonzalo passed it round. When he received it back, he called "Henry!" Then, to Murdock, "Our waiter is a member of the club. You have no objection to his seeing the list?"

"I have no objection to anyone seeing it," said Murdock.

Avalon cleared his throat. "Before we launch ourselves into speculation, Mr. Murdock, it is only fair to ask if you have given the matter some thought yourself."

Murdock's sorrowful face grew thoughtful. His lips pressed together and his eyes blinked. He said in a soft, almost shamefaced voice, "Gentlemen, I would like to tell you that I have resisted temptation completely, but the fact is I have not. I have thought deeply at times and tried to convince myself that one city or another fits my Uncle Haskell's hint so that I can offer it to the lawyer on Monday with a clear conscience. On occasion I have settled on one or another of the cities

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on the list but each time it was merely a case of fooling myself, of compromising, of pretending I was not gambling when I really was."

Rubin said, with a face innocently blank. "Have you prayed, Mr. Murdock? Have you sought divine guidance?"

For a moment it seemed as though Murdock's careful armor had been pierced, but only for a moment. After that slight pause he said, "If that were appropriate in this case I would have seen a solution without prayer. In God's eyes it is my needs that count and not my desires, and He knows my needs without my having to inform Him."

Rubin said, "Have you tried to approach the problem using the inferior weapon of reason?"

"I have, of course," said Murdock.

Rubin said, "And have you come to any favorite conclusion? You've said that you have been unable to settle on any one city definitely, to the point where you would consider its choice as no longer representing a gamble—but do you lean in one direction or another?"

"I have leaned in one direction at one time and in other directions at other times. I cannot honestly say that any one of the cities is my favorite. With your permission I will not tell you the thoughts that have struck me since it is *your* help I seek and I would prefer you to reach your conclusions, or hypotheses, uninfluenced by my thoughts. If you miss anything I have thought of, I will tell you."

"Fair enough," said Gonzalo, smoothing down one collar of his blazer with an air of absent self-satisfaction. "I suppose we first have to consider whether any of these cities is the one and only east."

Murdock said, "I would think so."

"In that case," said Gonzalo, "pardon me for mentioning the obvious, but the word 'east' occurs only in Easton. It is the one and only east."

"Oddly enough," said Murdock dryly, "I had not failed to notice that, Mr. Gonzalo. It strikes me as obvious enough to be ignored. My Uncle Haskell also said, 'Don't jump to a conclusion too soon.' "

"Ah," said Gonzalo, "but that might have been just to throw you off. The real gambler has to know when to bluff and your uncle could well have been bluffing. If he had that kind of humor, it would have seemed fun to him to give you the answer, let it lie there in the open, and then scare you out of accepting it."

Murdock said, "That may be

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so, but that sort of thing would mean I would have to penetrate my Uncle Haskell's mind and see whether he was capable of a double-doublecross or something like that. It would be a gamble and I won't gamble. Either the hint, properly interpreted, makes the matter so plain that it is no longer a gamble, or it is worthless. In short, Easton may be the city, but if so I will believe it only for some reason stronger than the mere occurrence of 'east' in its name."

Halsted, leaning forward toward Murdock, said, "I think no gambler worth his salt would set up a puzzle with so easy a solution as the connection between east and Easton. That's just misdirection. Let me point out something a little more reasonable, and a little more compelling. Of the six cities mentioned I believe Augusta is easternmost. Certainly it is in the state of Maine which is the easternmost of the fifty states. Augusta has to be the one and only east, and beyond any doubt."

Drake shook his head violently. "Quite wrong, Roger, quite wrong. It's just a common superstition that Maine is the easternmost state. Not since 1959. Once Alaska became the fiftieth state, *it* became the easternmost state."

Halsted frowned. "Westernmost, you mean, Jim."

"Westernmost *and* easternmost. And northernmost, too. Look, the 180° longitude line passes through the Aleutian Islands. The islands west of the line are in the eastern hemisphere. They are the *only* part of the fifty states that are in the eastern hemisphere and that makes Alaska the easternmost state—the one and only east."

"What about Hawaii?" asked Gonzalo.

"Hawaii does not reach the 180° mark. You can look it up on the map if you wish, but I know I'm right."

"It doesn't matter whether you're right or not," said Halsted. "Anchorage isn't on the other side of the 180° line, is it? So it's west, not east. In the case of Augusta the *city* is the easternmost of the six mentioned."

Murdock interrupted, "Gentlemen, it is not worth arguing the matter. I had thought of the eastern status of Maine, but did not find it compelling enough to convert it into making a bid. The fact that one can argue over the matter of Alaska versus Maine—and I admit that the Alaska angle had not occurred to me—removes both from the category of the *one and only* east."

Rubin said, "Besides, from

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the strictly geographic point, east and west are purely arbitrary terms. North and south are absolute since there is a fixed point on Earth that is the North Pole and another that is the South Pole. Of any two spots on Earth the one closer to the North Pole is farther north, the other farther south; but of those same two spots neither is farther east or farther west, for you can go from one to the other, or from the other to the one, by traveling either eastward or westward. There is no absolute eastern point or western point on Earth."

"Well, then," said Trumbull, "where does that get you, Manny?"

"To the psychological angle. What typifies east to us in the United States is the Atlantic Ocean. Our nation stretches from sea to shining sea and the only city on the list which is on the Atlantic Ocean is Perth Amboy. Augusta may be farther east geographically, but it is an inland city."

Trumbull said, "That's a bunch of nothing, Manny. The Atlantic Ocean symbolizes the east to us right now, but through most of the history of western civilization it represented the west, the *far* west. It wasn't till after Columbus sailed westward that it became the east to the colonists of the New World. If you want something that's east in the western tradition, and always has been east, it's China. The first Chinese city to be opened to Western trade was Canton, and the American city of Canton was actually named for the Chinese city. Canton *has* to be the one and only east."

Avalon lifted his hand and said with majestic severity, "I don't see that at all, Tom. Even if Canton typifies the east by its recall of a Chinese city, why is that the one *and only* east? Why not Cairo, Illinois, or Memphis, Tennessee, each of which typifies the ancient Egyptian east?"

"Because those cities aren't on the list, Jeff."

"No, but Athens, Georgia, is, and if there is one city in all the world that is the one and only east, it is Athens, Greece—the source and home of all the humanistic values we hold dear today, the school of Hellas and of all the west—"

"Of all the *west*, you idiot," said Trumbull, with sudden ferocity. "Athens was never considered the east either by itself or by others. The first great battle between east and west was Marathon in 490 B.C., and Athens represented the *west*."

Murdock interrupted, "Besides, my Uncle Haskell could scarcely have thought I would

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consider Athens uniquely eastern, when it has purely secular value. Had he included Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, on his list I might have chosen it at once with no sense of gamble. As it is, however, I can only thank you, gentlemen, for your efforts. The mere fact that you come to different conclusions and argue over them shows that all of you must be wrong. If one of you had the real answer it would be compelling enough to convince the others—and myself as well—at once. It may be, of course, that my Uncle Haskell deliberately gave me a meaningless clue for his own posthumous pleasure. If so, that does not, of course, in the least diminish my gratitude to you all for your hospitality, your company, and your efforts."

He would have risen to leave, but Avalon, on his left, put a courteous, but nonetheless authoritative, hand on his shoulder. "One moment, Mr. Murdock, one member of our little band has not yet spoken. —Henry, have you nothing to add?"

Murdock looked surprised. "Your waiter?"

"A Black Widower, as we said earlier. Henry, can you shed any light on this puzzle?"

Henry said solemnly, "It may be that I can, gentlemen. I was impressed by Mr. Murdock's earlier argument that reason is sometimes inadequate to reach the truth. Nevertheless, suppose we start with reason. Not ours, however, but that of Mr. Murdock's uncle. I have no doubt that he deliberately chose cities, each of which represented the east in some ambiguous fashion. But where would he find in that list an unambiguous and compelling reference? Perhaps we would know the answer if we remembered his special interests—Mr. Murdock did say that at one time he was working on a book concerning Restoration England. I believe that is the latter half of the Seventeenth Century."

"Charles the Second," said Rubin, "reigned from 1660 to 1685."

"I'm sure you are correct, Mr. Rubin," said Henry. "All the cities named are in the United States, so I wondered whether we might find something of interest in American history during the Restoration period."

"A number of colonies were founded in Charles the Second's reign," said Rubin.

"Was not Carolina one of them, sir?" asked Henry.

"Yes. Carolina was named for him, in fact, Charles is Carolus, in Latin."

"But later on Carolina proved

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unwieldy and was split into North Carolina and South Carolina."

"That's right. But what has that got to do with the list? There is no city in it from either Carolina."

"True enough, but the thought reminded me that there is also a North Dakota and a South Dakota, and for that matter a West Virginia but there is no American state that has East in its name. Of course, we might speak of East Texas or East Kansas or East Tennessee but—"

"More likely to say Eastern," muttered Halsted.

"Either way, sir, there would not be a one and only east. But—"

Gonzalo exploded in sudden excitement. "Wait a minute, Henry. I think I see what you're driving at. If we have the state of West Virginia—the one and only west—then we can consider Virginia to be East Virginia—the one and only east."

"No, you can't," said Trumbull, with a look of scorn on his face. "Virginia has been Virginia for three and a half centuries. Calling it East Virginia doesn't make it so."

"It would not matter if one did, Mr. Trumbull," said Henry, "since there is no Virginian city on the list. But before abandoning that line of thought, however, I remembered that Mr. Murdock's uncle lived in New Jersey and that his ancestors had lived there since Colonial times. Memories of my grade-school education stirred, for half a century ago we were much more careful about studying Colonial history than we are today.

"It seems to me, and I'm sure Mr. Rubin will correct me if I'm wrong, that at one time in its early history, New Jersey was divided into two parts—East Jersey and West Jersey, the two being separately governed. This did not last a long time—a generation, perhaps—and then the single state of New Jersey was reconstituted. East Jersey, however, is the only section of what are now the United States that had 'east' as a part of its official name as a colony or state."

Murdock looked interested. His lips lifted in what was almost a smile. "The one and only east. It could be."

"There is more to it than that," said Henry. "Perth Amboy was, in its time, the capital of East Jersey."

Murdock's eyes opened wide. "Are you serious, Henry?"

"I am quite certain of this and I think it is the compelling factor. It was the capital of the one and only east in the list of

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colonies and states. I do not think you will lose the inheritance if you offer that name on Monday; nor do I think you will be gambling."

Rubin said, scowling, "I *said* Perth Amboy."

"For a noncompelling reason," said Drake. "How do you do it, Henry?"

Henry smiled slightly, "By abandoning reason for something more certain, as Mr. Murdock suggested at the start."

"What are you talking about, Henry?" said Avalon. "You worked it out very nicely by a line of neat argument."

"After the fact, sir," said Henry. "While all of you were applying reason, I took the liberty of seeking authority and turned to the reference shelf we use to settle arguments. I looked up each city in *Webster's Geographical Dictionary*. Under Perth Amboy it is clearly stated that it was once the capital of East Jersey."

He held out the book and Rubin snatched it from his hands, to check the matter for himself.

"It is easy to argue backward, gentlemen," said Henry.

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a *NEW* Petrella story by MICHAEL GILBERT

first publication in the United States

"Ah, take one consideration with another—A policeman's lot is not a happy one!" Yes, it's all in the day's—and night's—work, even after pounding the beat for more than fifteen hours . . .

NOTHING HAPPENS ON HIGHSIDE

by MICHAEL GILBERT

To Detective Constable Patrick Petrella the section called Highside was the least interesting part of the manor. It stretched, like the lives of its inhabitants, from the Lying-In Hospital at the foot of the hill to the public cemetery at the top—a honeycomb of tight, respectable streets constructed, as an act of faith, out of yellow brick and second-quality slates by a tight, respectable builder.

The backbone of Highside was Haig Road, and Petrella was walking up it to see a Mr. Gosport who might be able to give him some information about two other men, who might know something about alleged irregularities at the railway depot. A thunderstorm had been hanging about over North London all day. The evening was heavy with undischarged artillery; and his feet kept reminding Petrella that he had been on top of them for 15 hours.

Ahead of him, out of a side road, came Sir Douglas Haig. That was what it seemed like at the time. It was all there, the neat compact figure, the clipped gray mustache, the kindly ruthless eye; the eye of Bapaume and Passchendaele, the eye of the Ancre and the Somme.

He was walking well, for a man of his age. But that was right, too, thought Petrella; had not the Field Marshal kept his mind and his figure to the last? Suppose that great men were condemned to visit every street and square and public house named after them. The Duke of

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Wellington and Prince Albert would have walked a few miles and drunk a few pints before they won their way to paradise.

When he reached the top of the hill the Field Marshal had disappeared. No—as you were. Petrella, standing on the corner of the pavement, could see his head. He had gone into the cemetery and was sitting—or was he kneeling?—by one of the new white marble crosses.

Petrella trudged on. Mr. Gosport was not at home. Mrs. Gosport explained that he was "on nights" now. He might be back in time for breakfast. It all depended on shifts. Or that was what *he* said. She had no way of checking up on him. Sometimes he said he'd been working a double shift and came home full of beer. Once she'd found a girl's hair clip wedged in his top pocket. He hadn't tried *that* lark twice.

Petrella listened with a quarter of his mind and made sympathetic noises at the right places. When he got out he went back to the cemetery. The gray man was gone. Petrella found a new cross and squatted beside it to read the spidery lettering.

Arthur Millichip
The summons came for him in his 84th year
At rest awaiting the last call

A boy and a girl were walking together on the pavement opposite. Petrella couldn't see them, but he heard the boy say, ". . . Swing in a lovely center and Sam just nodded it into the net." The girl said, "Go on." She even managed to sound interested. Courting, thought Petrella. He won't get away with spiels like that once he's married.

He could have gone home himself, to supper and bed. So far as he kept any hours he was long past the end of his duty, and the house where he lodged with Mrs. Catt was only two streets off. Instead he trudged back to the police station.

As he was climbing the stairs to the C.I.D. room he heard Sergeant Gwilliam laughing. It was the sort of laugh that took more than a locked door to contain it. There was 224 pounds of Sergeant Gwilliam, but very little of it was fat and he had played Rugby football for the police in the golden prewar days when the blue jerseys had carried all before them in London Club football.

"What's the joke?" said Petrella.

"Guess who just came in?"

"I'm too tired to guess."

"Ginny Lewis."

"Came in or was brought in?" asked Petrella. Ginny was a hard character, past his first

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evil youth—a middle-aged bully grown callous in wrong-doing.

"Walked in on his own feet. The joke is what he came here for."

Petrella could think of nothing save force that would bring Ginny to a police station.

"He came," said Sergeant Gwilliam impressively, "to see could he have police protection!"

Petrella laughed too, but absent-mindedly. Something was nibbling at the edges of memory.

When he got home he was too tired to eat and fell into his bed and to sleep. It was not the easy sleep of comfortable tiredness and relaxation. He was so near the surface that he saw the lightning, and was wide-awake before the thunder rattled the slates of the little house. Then the rain came, in a steady drumming roar, and passed on.

It was in the silence that followed that the still, small voice of conscience said to Petrella, "Of course, you fool, you were looking at the wrong grave."

It took no more than three minutes to throw on some clothes and then he was out in the street, belting his raincoat as he went. The stars were hidden, but the air felt cooler, and there was a tinkle of fresh water running down the gutters. He climbed the cemetery railings without difficulty—they were designed to keep the children out, not the dead in. On the gravel path he paused for a moment. It was not going to be so easy to find the exact spot he wanted.

When he had stood on the pavement earlier in the evening he had seen the gray man's head. And the man had been sitting or squatting down. Later, when he himself had knelt beside one of the graves, a young couple had passed, and he had been quite unable to see either of them. *Therefore he had been too far down the slope.* A good deal too far.

The best plan would be to locate Arthur Millichip and move uphill and to the right from there. He used his flashlight sparingly—there were houses overlooking the cemetery and the last thing he wanted was a prowl car on the scene. He could almost hear Sergeant Gwilliam laughing.

Away to the south, over the Kent and Surrey hills, the lightning played and the thunder cracked and grumbled. An occasional single heavy spot of rain fell on him out of the black ceiling of the clouds. He found Arthur Millichip when he had almost given up hope. At rest,

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awaiting the last call.

Up the hill now. When he saw the other cross it was obvious how he had made his mistake. Both were white and both were new. Mass-produced, probably by the same monumental mason who had his little shop outside the gates. Petrella hooded his light and squatted down.

The moment he read what was there, all his fears became cold certainties.

He stepped back onto the path, trotted to the gate, and hauled himself over. A rapid calculation. Two minutes to the nearest call box. Say ten minutes if he ran, straight down the hill, to the police station. Speed was impossible under that black pall of darkness. He chose the box.

Sergeant Gwilliam answered himself. It took him a few seconds to understand what Petrella was talking about. Then he said, "I'll get a car to pick you up at Four Ways."

Less than three minutes later—perhaps five in all from the moment he had read what was engraved on the tombstone—Petrella was in the C.I.D. room talking to Sergeant Gwilliam. "Annie Lewis," he said, "wife of George Lewis, née Cole. And it was Cole I saw this afternoon. I'm sure of that, although I've only seen photographs. He was sent up before I came here."

"Slowly, lad, slowly," said Sergeant Gwilliam. "Let's look at the fences before we jump them. I know Harry Cole well enough. It was me pulled him in. And his daughter, Annie, married Ginny Lewis, sure enough. And Lewis and Cole worked as a pair. Housebreaking, a little smash-and-grab."

"When you sent Cole up for his long stretch," said Petrella, "why didn't Lewis go with him?"

"It was five years ago," growled the Sergeant. "I believe there was some trouble between them."

"Did Lewis buy himself out by turning Cole in?"

"Not exactly. But there was something . . ." The Sergeant put his hand through his hair and stared at the discolored spot above the door, which looked like old dried blood, but was really a leaking water pipe. "I'd say that Cole stood the rap for both of them," he said at last. "Lewis was a younger man. And married to Cole's daughter, you see."

"Yes," said Petrella. He knew enough about professional criminals to know that this could be true: "But if Cole thought Lewis hadn't kept *his* part of the bargain—"

"If he thought that," said

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Sergeant Gwilliam simply, "there'd be trouble."

The telephone sounded.

Sergeant Gwilliam listened like a man who has been expecting nothing but bad news, and at the end of it said, "Thank you very much," and replaced the receiver reverently on its cradle. "That was Central," he said. "I put an inquiry through to them after your call. You are quite right. Cole was released from Parkhurst after breakfast yesterday morning."

Petrella caught a glimpse of himself in the glass as they went out of the door. His pajama collar had somehow escaped from the neck of the sweater he had pulled hastily over it and was sticking up through the collar of his raincoat. He jabbed it back with nervous fingers.

The car was still waiting. "Cadsand Cottages," said Gwilliam to the driver. "Stop when you get to the end of the road and turn your lights out." And to Petrella, as they ran along the empty High Street, "No wonder Ginny asked for protection."

Petrella agreed. He had seen Harry Cole's face only twice —once in a photograph, once that evening. It was a face with the composed remoteness of a thinker or a killer.

"Stop here," said Gwilliam to the driver. "You can put the car across the end of the road, with the lights out. If anyone comes running, grab them."

The driver, a long gloomy man called Happy, said, "If you say so, Sergeant," and Gwilliam and Petrella got quietly out. They took care not to bang the car doors. It was very dark but the rain had stopped.

"Ginny lives in the end cottage," said Gwilliam. "He's alone now, since Annie died."

That was the last thing said. After that they felt their way. Down the stone-paved lane, across the litter that was part garden, part builder's yard, round the side of the ramshackle brick building.

The Sergeant gave a grunt of displeasure. The back door was ajar. Then they were standing in a small room—a kitchen, by the stale smell of it. And a tap was dripping somewhere. Gwilliam's big flash opened up like a searchlight. It was aimed at the ceiling. In the middle of the gray plaster was a darker mark, the size of a plate. In the middle of the plate something gathered; and another drop fell down to the stone floor with a soft splash.

Upstairs, on the floor of his overfurnished bedroom, lay the empty carcass of Ginny Lewis. He had been neatly butchered and left to die. There was no

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one else in the house.

After that there was a lot to be done. For Petrella, pressed down by the double weight of the night and of a mortal weariness, things seemed to pass in slow motion. First the cars arrived, then the doctor, then the men with flashlights and cameras, and policemen, and more policemen, and a real, white-haired Chief Superintendent who, although it was only five o'clock in the morning, had somehow found time to shave his pink chin before coming to Cadsand Cottages.

Petrella, forgotten, propped up the jamb of the kitchen door. The bulk of Sergeant Gwilliam loomed down upon him. "Go to bed," he said. "There's nothing you can do here."

"Any sign of Cole?"

"Not a sausage. But we've put the net out. Incidentally, it looks as if Ginny was carrying a gun. Only he didn't reach it quick enough."

"Then Cole's probably got the gun in his pocket now."

"Probably," said Sergeant Gwilliam. "It won't make any difference. We'll pick him up as soon as it's light."

Remembering that calm and masterful eye, Petrella did not feel so sure. He cadged a lift in a returning car to the foot of Highside and walked off up the hill. The storm, which had been grumbling in the background like a much-enduring woman, put out a last long venomous tongue of lightning and showed Harry Cole.

He was sitting on a flat gravestone in the cemetery, his head on his hands. Petrella's first thought was, if they hadn't all been half asleep, that was just exactly where the search should have started. Then Petrella had jumped the railing and was walking steadily along the grass verge.

Cole was sitting up now. He had Ginny's gun—all right. It was in his hand, and his hand was resting on his knee, steady as the stone beneath him. There was enough light in the sky now to see by.

"Sit down," said Cole. "Don't come any nearer."

Petrella hesitated for a moment, then his tired legs folded under him and he sat. They both sat, he on one forgotten moss-covered slab, Harry Cole on another, with the new white headstone shining between them.

"She was my daughter," said Cole at last. "You knew that?"

"I found out tonight," said Petrella.

"A cheap piece of stone. If you killed your wife, you'd give her something better than that, wouldn't you?"

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"I'm not married," said Petrella.

"He didn't even pay for it himself. First he let her die, then he put her away under a cheap white stone he never even paid for himself."

"I don't—"

"The doctor called it malnutrition. You're educated. You know what that means, I suppose?"

"I don't—"

"It means he starved her to death. I know. I was in Parkhurst. They've got a good news service there. It isn't printed. It comes to you along the hot-water pipes, in the evening."

Petrella said, "Look here—" but he might as well have tried to stop a gramophone by talking against it.

The light was coming up fast and the little cold morning wind blew into his face. His fingers touched something small and hard. It was the extension switch of his flashlight. The flash itself was somewhere behind his back slung to the belt of his raincoat. He started to joggle the switch. Three long—three short—three long. Someone must be looking from their window by now.

Time went by.

"You're young," said Cole suddenly. "Too young to understand what it is to hate. A man can live on hate. Did you know that?"

"It's a poor food," said Petrella. His fingers kept working.

"It can be meat and strong drink, and a fire to warm you through the long winter nights when the heat isn't working in the cell and you've nothing but one blanket over you. It was easy. He knew I was coming. He lived with fear. I lived with hate. It's a good bargain, boy."

"It's a foul bargain," said Petrella. He was suddenly quite cool, for he had heard the sounds he was waiting for. A car, coming fast, up the hill. When it stopped, he knew.

"There's one thing you didn't know," he said. "The grapevine must have missed out on it. Ginny Lewis never killed your daughter. Neither killed nor let her die."

"Why do you trouble to tell such lies, boy?"

"I'm not lying, and you know it." Look at him. Talk to him. Keep his attention. Big Gwilliam was over the wall behind Cole and coming with the fast controlled rush that had once sent him across the line at Twickenham with half the English pack on his back.

The gun in Cole's hand shifted slightly. It gave a small sad crack, and he folded onto the ground under an avalanche of bodies. But he was dead be-

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fore they touched him.

That took a little time to sort out, too. And it was the uncomfortable hour of six when Petrella and Sergeant Gwilliam turned their backs on Highside Cemetery and the body that still lay there.

"Funny," said Gwilliam, "that he should have gone without knowing that Ginny Lewis, whatever his sins, had no part in Annie's death. The prison grapevine told him that Annie had died and been buried by public funds. It forgot to tell him that Lewis was inside as well. On a two-year stretch for receiving."

They both turned and looked at the dead man, flat on the grass, like a doll with the stuffing out.

Petrella thought of Ginny Lewis. Two men, both empty. One empty with fear, the other empty with hate. He looked at his watch. If he hurried he would just be in time to catch Mr. Gosport.

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a NEW Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The second in the new series about Dr. Sam Hawthorne, retired New England physician who looks backward on the long road of the years and reminisces . . . Strange cases came Dr. Sam's way. This one concerned a naturalist's notebooks, and while it wasn't a "miracle problem," it certainly looked like a puzzle impossible to solve. No skeleton of a tale this—a sinewy story with plenty of plot on its bones . . .

THE PROBLEM OF THE OLD GRISTMILL

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"Now murders didn't come every day to our little town o' Northmont, and after the covered-bridge affair it was more than a year before I was faced with another mystery that seemed impossible to solve. By July of 1923, after eighteen months of medical practice in the area, I'd become an accepted member of the community. I knew most o' the men by their first names, and their wives an' children, too. They'd stopped kiddin' me about my yellow Pierce-Arrow Runabout—a med-school graduation gift from my folks—and sometimes the kids would even ask for rides in it."

Dr. Sam Hawthorne paused to take a sip from the small glass in his hand.

"The year had started violently, when a convict named Delos killed a guard while escaping from state prison on New Year's Day. Now, beneath a hot an' brooding July sun, the odor of death was still in the air. Word had come from Mexico of the assassination of Pancho Villa, shot sixteen times as he drove down from the hills in his car. And within weeks we were to learn of the death of

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President Harding on the west coast.

"But the death that concerned me was much closer to home . . . Could I int'rest you in a—ah—small libation?"

"Land sakes, Dr. Sam! What you doin' out this neck o' the woods? Someone sick, or you lookin' for a good still?"

"Neither one," I told Minnie Dranger, pulling my car off the side of the road so I could chat with her. She was one of those buxom country women who seemed ageless, going on from year to year like the endless flowing of the mill stream. She always joked about bootleg whiskey out in the woods, but in truth we were only 150 miles from the Canadian border and everything we needed came in that way. "I'm on my way to Hawkins' gristmill to see Henry Cordwainer before he leaves."

"So'm I. Can I ride along?"

"Sure can, Minnie, if you don't mind bein' seen in my car."

She climbed into the seat beside me, depositing her bulky string bag on the floor by her feet. "Folks hereabouts name it a treat to ride with you, Dr. Sam."

"Glad to hear that."

I turned the yellow Runabout onto the mill road and we bumped along in silence for a few moments. Henry Cordwainer had become something of a local celebrity in the months he'd been living at Hawkins' gristmill, and it was a measure of his fame that two people as different as Minnie and me were coming to see him off.

Cordwainer was a full-bearded naturalist in the best New England tradition of Thoreau. He'd settled into the old mill ten months earlier, arriving with the first chill of late September. They said he was writing a book about the seasons along Snake Creek, but during those first few months hardly anyone ever saw him. Even his food and supplies were delivered to the mill. But after a few months things changed. People began to see him, and to like him. He really was writin' a book, and he even let us read some of the early passages.

I took to stopping by the mill on spring evenings, sitting with him beneath the flowering dogwoods, joining him in an illegal beer and listenin' to his rambling reminiscences. Then he would bring out the journal and I'd read his beautifully phrased notes about autumn on Snake Creek.

"Who'd be interested in reading this sort of book?" I asked one night, when the beers had strengthened my courage.

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He shrugged and scratched at his beard. "Who reads Thoreau?"

"Not very many people, at first."

"True enough."

I picked up one of the recent journals, but there was nothing in it but a handwritten copy of a newspaper clipping. "Take this, for instance." And I read:

> Fifty Pounds Reward —Mysteriously Disappeared on the afternoon of the 20th ult., a Young Lady, 22 years of age, rather less than 5 feet in height, of sallow complexion, grey eyes, brown hair, and bearing evident marks of recent illness. She wore a black silk dress, a straw hat trimmed with white, and had with her a black travelling trunk. Information should be forwarded to Mr. C. F. Field (late Chief of the Metropolitan Police), Private Inquiry-office, 20, Devereux-court, Temple.

"That," Henry Cordwainer explained with a smile, "was a classified advertisement which had been circled in pencil on the front page of the London *Times* for August 6, 1873." When he saw my puzzlement he added, "I found the newspaper right upstairs, on the second floor of this very mill. There was a pile of old rags and magazines and papers, and this was one of 'em. I put it in my journal as a curiosity, because what would a fifty-year-old London newspaper be doing in an old New England mill? And especially with an item marked that way?"

"Many of the people hereabouts came from England. Hawkins, who used to operate the mill here, was English. He might have come over at about that time. Maybe he brought the newspaper from his last day in the mother country."

"Maybe," the bearded naturalist agreed. "But I can't help wondering about Mr. C. F. Field, late Chief of the Metropolitan Police. D'you think he ever found the young lady?"

That was the way one o' the conversations had gone. More often they dealt with the creek itself, with the various forms of wildlife Cordwainer found along its banks, and with the changing of the seasons. Though he avoided socializin' with the town residents, the naturalist was quick to lend a hand on community projects. During the winter when the creek froze over, he could be seen helping to saw ice for storage in the commercial icehouse that adjoined the mill. And on the first warm weekend of spring he joined the others for the annual cemetery cleanup.

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Now, in late July, his journal was completed. It filled some three-dozen composition books such as students used, and bore the title *A Year on Snake Creek*, though in truth he'd been there only a bit over ten months. But now he was leaving, and Minnie Dranger and I had come to say our goodbyes.

I parked the Runabout next to Seth Hawkins' black Ford and we went inside. Cordwainer was busy packin' his books and journals inside a big wood-and-metal strongbox I'd seen before, all the while carrying on a running conversation with young Hawkins. "Hate to leave this place," he was saying. "You've all been mighty friendly to me here."

Young Seth Hawkins was a gangly farm lad just turned 20. His father had died five years ago and Seth had been too young to carry on the gristmill business himself. So the mill had closed down, though Seth's mother was reluctant to sell it. She still hoped Seth would take it over someday and build it back into the profitable business her husband had once had. Renting it to Cordwainer for a year had been a small source of income to the family, and now that he was leaving, the question of Seth's future was bein' raised again.

"We were mighty glad to have you here," Seth told Cordwainer. "Mebbe your book will make the old mill famous."

The naturalist gazed up at the stone walls and the rough-hewn wood ceiling. "I'll have fond memories of the place," he admitted. "I loved it even when the grain dust made me sneeze." Then he saw Minnie and me. "Two more good friends! How are you, Dr. Sam? Minnie?"

"Land sakes, Henry Cordwainer, the old mill ain't goin' to be the same 'thout you!" She put down her bag and went to him, embracing him like a mother. "Why not stay another year?"

"I wish I could, Minnie. But I'm only on a sabbatical. I have to go back to teaching in September. Even Thoreau left his cabin, you know." He liked mentioning Thoreau, and at times I wondered just how good a journal he had written. I wished he'd let me read some of his later notes.

"I'll help you with those," I said, taking a pile of books from Seth Hawkins and loading them into the strongbox on top of the journals. I wasn't that much older than Seth, but there seemed a world of difference between us. The death of his father had done nothing to thrust maturity onto his narrow shoulders.

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"Is there anything else of yours upstairs?" Seth asked Cordwainer.

The naturalist hesitated. "I think that's everything, but you might check upstairs for me, Seth."

"That boy'll be lost without you," Minnie said when he was out of earshot. "Now that you're leavin', his mom wants him to start the mill up again."

Cordwainer shrugged. "Maybe it's good for him that I'm going. It'll force him to make a decision." He closed the lid of the strongbox. "Will you help me get this chest to the depot, Dr. Sam?"

"Where's it going?"

"I'm shipping it on to Boston. I'll pick it up there in a few days and then take the journals to my publisher."

I'd reached out to touch the familiar worn spots on the strongbox lid when we heard a muffled shout from above. "What's that lad into now?" Minnie asked, starting for the stairs as I followed.

We found him in the upper room of the gristmill, near a pile of rubbish Cordwainer had mentioned to me earlier. "Look at this!" he said.

In his rummagings he'd uncovered a human skull. Minnie Dranger gasped and stepped back, but I took the skull in my hand. "It's from some medical school or doctor's office," I assured them. "See how the lower jaw is wired onto the rest? They don't just *come* that way."

"What's it doin' up there?" Minnie wanted to know.

"Some kids probably stole it and left it here." I turned to Seth. "The place is your property. If you don't want this, I'll take it back to my office."

"Go ahead, take it! I don't want it."

"Every good doctor's office needs a skull."

We went back downstairs and I showed my acquisition to Cordwainer. He was just closin' the lid of his strongbox, and securing the hasp with a big padlock. "I'm ready whenever you are," he told me.

"Seth found this skull. I'm taking it for my office."

"That should scare the patients away," he said with a grin.

We carried the strongbox out to my car and stowed it in the side luggage well. I wondered how to fit both Minnie and Cordwainer into my two-seater, but Seth solved the problem by offering to take her in his car. "Will I see you agin before you go?" she asked.

Cordwainer smiled. "Sure, Minnie. I have to wind up some business in town and then come back out here. I probably won't leave till morning."

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Seth's black Ford followed us into town, but turned off towards Minnie's farm when we reached the depot. I helped Cordwainer get the box inside and waited while it was weighed and tagged for railway-express shipment to Boston.

"That's forty-five pounds," the clerk said, accepting Cordwainer's money.

"There's some mighty valuable notes and journals in this box," the naturalist said. "Take good care of 'em."

"Don't worry," the clerk told him. "You can watch me put it on the train right now if you want."

We stood on the station platform while the strongbox was wheeled with a shipment of other parcels to a waiting freight car. "How soon will it reach Boston?" Cordwainer asked.

"Tomorrow mornin', I expect," the freight clerk answered.

That seemed to satisfy him and he turned towards the car. "Thanks for helpin' me, Dr. Sam."

"The least I could do. Can I give you a lift somewhere? How about some coffee?"

"No, no. I have to close out my account at the bank and pay a bill at the general store."

I dropped him at the bank and drove to my office. Not surprisingly, my nurse April was on the phone, making frantic excuses for my absence. When she hung up she said, "Dr. Sam, where've you been? There are patients waitin' to see you, and Aaron Spring just went an' fell off'n his tractor."

"Aaron? Badly hurt?"

"He mighta broke somethin'."

I started for the door again, picking up my bag on the way. "Explain to the patients, April. I'll be back soon as I can."

In the winter the women had babies, and in the summer the men had accidents on the farm. It was an endless cycle that I'd discovered after only 18 months. But Aaron Spring was luckier than most. He had a disclocated right shoulder and a bump on his head, but no broken bones. I taped up the shoulder and told him to take things easy for a few days.

Then I went back to the office and sat through the usual assortment of afternoon patients. At least half of them seemed to have some illness that demanded the prescribing of alcohol, and this was always a problem. Generally I ended up silently cursin' the Volstead Act and writin' the prescription.

That evening, after my usual dinner alone, I decided on a drive to the next town. I knew

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some cockfights were being held in a barn there, and though I disapproved of the sport it always furnished a colorful evening. Some bootleggers would surely drive over from Boston, and I felt the need of a drink. Prescribin' it for others could give one a mighty big thirst of his own.

As I was drivin' along the dirt road to Calkins' Corners, I saw Sheriff Lens in his car ahead of me. "Evenin', Sheriff," I called out as I passed.

"Hi there, Doc. How's things?"

"Haven't lost a patient all day. You out patrollin'?"

Sheriff Lens grunted. "There's a light up at the mill. Somebody called me about it. Didn't that naturalist fella go back to Boston?"

"I think he's leaving in the mornin'. He's probably still up there."

"Guess I'll go check. The Hawkins family pay their taxes. They deserve to have their property protected."

I drove on into Calkins' Corners. There was a crowd at the barn for the cockfight, and I had to park in a field down the road. They were city people mainly, thrilled at the thought of doin' something illegal. There were college boys and their dates, drinkin' from silver hip flasks as they moved among the locals. There were darker, quieter men, too—the professional gamblers who traveled the cockfight circuit up from the south. And there were the bootleggers conducting their business out behind the barn.

As the bets were placed on the first match, I bought a quart of good Scotch and locked it away in the side luggage well of my car. It was a likely place for the police to search, but I knew Sheriff Lens wasn't going to stop me. I went inside the barn, staying near the edge of the crowd, and was surprised when I saw young Seth Hawkins there, too.

"Hello, Dr. Sam. What brings you to a cockfight?"

"I could ask you the same thing, Seth."

He shrugged. "Just somethin' to do."

A roar went up from the crowd as the two birds clashed. "Now that Cordwainer's leaving, are you going to reopen the gristmill?" I asked him.

Seth seemed pained by my question. "My father was one man and I'm another. Why does everyone expect me to follow in his path?"

"Everyone doesn't."

"My mother does, and she's the most important one." He glanced toward the cockpit but seemed uninterested in the bat-

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tle. "Jeepers, I wish I had a drink!"

Perhaps he'd seen me buying the Scotch. In any event, it was not a request I could ignore. "Come on, I've got some in the car." My fingers felt some dampness in the luggage well, and for a moment I feared my bottle o' Scotch was leakin'. But the bottle was full and unopened. I poured us each a drink in two small metal cups I carried in my bag. "Tastes good."

He nodded in quick agreement. "The real stuff."

I put the bottle away. It would do neither of us any good to be picked up for drunken driving. "Are you staying for the rest of the fights?"

He took out his pocket watch. "No, I'd better head on back. Tomorra I'll have to start cleanin' out the mill."

"Sheriff Lens said there was a light up there. I told him it was Cordwainer's last night."

"I hate to see him go. First time I met him, when he rented the place, I didn't like him a'tol. Next time I saw him, helpin' with the ice in January, he seemed like a pretty good fella."

"You've spent a lot of time up there."

He nodded. "Two, three nights a week. I learned a lot from him, and not just about science neither. He knows about life."

I started out for home with Seth following behind me in his Ford. We passed a state police car on the road, and I wondered if it might be on the way to raid the cockfight. Probably not, I decided.

While we were still some distance from Northmont I spotted the reddish glow in the night sky. I waited till the Ford drew abreast and called out, "Looks like a fire."

Seth Hawkins nodded. "Somewhere up around the mill road."

We turned off our route and headed in the direction of the blaze. Before long I saw that it was on the mill road—the gristmill was in flames!

I drove as close as I could and then abandoned the car behind the horse-drawn town pumper. A hose line had already been run to the creek and the volunteers were pourin' water onto the blaze. The first person I saw was Aaron Spring, runnin' with the others despite his taped shoulder and bandaged head.

"You should be home in bed, Aaron," I shouted, running along side of him.

"I'm the fire chief, Doc! We don't often git ourselves a blaze like this one."

It was true. The entire mill

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seemed about to be consumed, though I realized quickly enough that the stone walls of the lower floor would not burn. I saw Sheriff Lens and called out to him, "Anybody inside?"

"Hope not," he replied.

"How about Cordwainer?"

"Don't know. The fire had too good a start when I came up here to check on that light. I couldn't get inside to search for him."

Within another hour the volunteers had the blaze under control—meaning most everything that could burn had already done so. As they doused water on the last of the glowing embers, Sheriff Lens and I entered the lower floor through a door on the river side.

Using lanterns to guide us, we found Henry Cordwainer's body in the ruins. Though his skin and clothes and beard were charred, the body itself was not too badly burned. The stone walls of the lower floor had protected it. And there was no doubt as to the cause of death. The side of his skull had been crushed by repeated blows.

Cordwainer's body was sent to the county seat for an autopsy, (the old doctor continued), and even by their primitive standards they were able to determine that the lungs were free of smoke. Cordwainer had been dead before the fire started, which didn't really surprise any of us.

"It's another case for you, Dr. Sam," the sheriff said. "Like that covered-bridge thing last year."

Aaron Spring, the fire chief, joined in. "Our own Sherlock Holmes! You even got the same initials—Sam Hawthorne and Sherlock Holmes."

I didn't take well to their jokin', because I'd liked Cordwainer. The man had been murdered, and most likely it was someone we all knew.

That first afternoon Cordwainer's brother and a fellow professor came down from Boston to claim the body. He'd been unmarried, and something of a loner, apparently. The brother, John Cordwainer, stared hard at the body and nodded. "It's Henry, all right. Burned, but I can tell. Haven't heard from him in months. I guess he was never very friendly."

"I knew him quite well," I told the brother. "He was a friend to all of us here."

"What about his notes, his journals?"

It was the first time I'd thought of them. "We shipped them to Boston by train. I helped him take the strongbox to the depot."

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John Cordwainer gave a mirthless laugh. "That damn strongbox! I used to kid him about it. You'd think he was transporting Wells Fargo gold!"

"The key's probably one of these," Sheriff Lens said, producin' the ring we'd taken from the body. "I don't know about the claim check, though. It mighta got burned up."

"I'll go with you to get it," I volunteered. "We can get the claim-check number from the depot at this end."

For some reason Cordwainer's journal had become very important to me. I was remembering the skull on the second floor and the old newspapers the naturalist had found. Had he speculated in that journal of his about some forgotten crime he'd come across? I remembered how he'd never let me read his most recent entries—my browsin' was always confined to entries for the first few months or to the clippings and items he had inserted in the journal. What had he been writin' during those final months? Was it something important enough to cost his life?

We obtained a copy of the baggage claim check and went into Boston the following morning. It was two years since I'd seen the city, and driving past the Common on the way to the North Station I had a sudden longing for it again. Life in rural New England had its charms, but it had its lack, too. There was not a young lady in all of Northmont as pretty as the ones who now passed across my line of vision.

Cordwainer and I waited impatiently as the familiar strongbox was located and brought out. The first chill of something on my spine came when I saw the clerk carrying it under his arm without effort. Henry Cordwainer and I had struggled to get it to the depot.

"Feels empty," the clerk said, putting it on the counter.

The brother stared at me. "Empty?"

"That can't be," I said. I found the correct key, opened the lock, and threw back the lid.

The strongbox was empty.

The journals of Henry Cordwainer had vanished.

My nurse April was far more sympathetic than Sheriff Lens (the old man went on). She canceled all but the most urgent of my patients for that afternoon, then sat with me in the office after the last of them had gone. She may not have been as young or lovely as the Boston girls, but I was willin' to bet she was a better nurse than any of 'em.

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"The strongbox was *empty*?"

I nodded. "Empty. Three dozen journal books and a couple of dozen of his regular books—all gone. Not a trace of them."

"Someone stole them!" she decided at once.

"Sure, but how?"

"The box was broken into."

"No. It was solid wood, with metal edges and metal bands going around it. The padlock hadn't been tampered with—I examined it closely. Hell, April, it's the sort of strongbox that banks use! The only thing I could find was a tiny hole that had been drilled through the wood at the bottom. And, I almost forgot, some grains of sawdust inside the box."

"Sawdust?"

I nodded again. "Our thief somehow got to the box while it was on the train or in Boston. He got by all the guards, tipped the box over, drilled an eighth-inch hole in the bottom—and through that tiny hole took out those thirty-six journals and the books. And all without being seen."

"Well, that's plain impossible, Dr. Sam."

"I know," I said gloomily.

But if April was in sympathy with my puzzlement, Sheriff Lens was not. He didn't want to hear about any missing journals. "Let the Boston police worry about that," he told me. "I've got a murder case on my hands."

"Don't you see the two are the same, Sheriff? The person who stole those journals killed Cordwainer to keep him from ever duplicating them."

Sheriff Lens shrugged. "The box was probably empty all the time."

"The box was *not* empty! I helped load it myself. I helped carry it to the depot. The bill of lading shows it weighed forty-five pounds. Empty—the way we found it—the box weighed only eleven pounds. That's thirty-four pounds of books and journals missing!"

"You say there was a hole drilled in the bottom. Maybe someone poured acid in it."

"Acid that destroyed everything but left the strongbox itself untouched?"

The sheriff waved his hand. "I don't know. Don't bother me about it. I'm close to makin' an arrest."

That news surprised me. "An arrest? Who?"

"You'll find out."

And I did find out, the following day. Old Minnie Dranger brought me the news. "Land sakes, Dr. Sam, the sheriff's gone an' arrested Seth Hawkins for the murder!"

"Seth?" I couldn't believe it. "But that's impossible!"

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"Sheriff Lens says the boy was so feared of havin' to start operatin' the mill that he burned it down. Cordwainer caught him at it and got killed."

I went storming out of my office. "That's the damnedest fool thing I ever heard of!"

I found Sheriff Lens at the jail, just completing the arrest forms. "I think I've got a pretty good case," he said. " 'Course he hasn't confessed yet."

"Sheriff, listen to me! I was with Seth Hawkins at the time the mill caught on fire. We were twelve miles away, at a cockfight over in Calkins' Corners."

"Yep, he told me that."

"Don't you believe him? It's the truth!"

"Oh, I believe him all righty. An' I believe you, Dr. Sam. But that's just the sorta alibi a killer would think up now, ain't it? He bops Cordwainer on the head, kills him, and then sets a candle to burnin' on a pile of oily rags. The candle burns down slow, the rags catch fire, an' by that time he's twelve miles away."

"Did you find any evidence of that?"

"No, but I will. This time I beat you to the killer, Doc."

"I didn't know we were having a contest."

I went back to my office in low spirits and found Minnie Dranger still waiting. "What'd he say?"

"Not much," I admitted. "He thinks Seth's guilty."

"What do *you* think, Dr. Sam?"

"He's about as guilty as you are, Minnie. And I'm going to prove it."

I had made a purchase at a medical supply house in Boston. It was strictly experimental, and I knew full well I could lose my license if anything went wrong. Still, I felt it was worth the risk. Later that day I outlined my plan to April.

"I'll need your assistance at the jail," I said.

"It sounds risky, Dr. Sam."

"Everything's risky."

"Will Sheriff Lens agree to it?"

"Don't know," I admitted. But I intended to find out.

I found the sheriff in his office and came right to the point. "Suppose there was a chemical—a drug—that could tell you whether or not Seth Hawkins is guilty."

"Sure, Doc, if there was a chemical like that I'd be out of a job!"

"Listen—there is! It was written up a few weeks ago, in the July ninth issue of this new magazine, *Time*. It's called scopolamin, and it's a poisonous alkaloid anesthetic derived from deadly nightshade. It's

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like hypnosis, and a person injected with it is powerless to lie. They've tested it at San Quentin, and in Chicago and Texas."

"A sorta truth serum?" Sheriff Lens said with a chuckle. "You believe that hogwash?"

"I believe it enough to have bought a sample of scopolamin when I was in Boston. With your permission, and Seth's, I'd like to try it on him."

"That's crazy," the sheriff growled, losing his good humor.

"What have you got to lose? If he's guilty you'll have a confession."

"Yeah . . ."

The magazine article had been careful to say that such confessions could not be used in court because of the rule against self-incrimination, but I didn't feel I needed to tell Sheriff Lens that. I was utterly confident there'd be no confession for him to hear. "How about it? Willing to back up your arrest with a scientific test?"

He thought about it some more. Finally he said, "We'll see what the prisoner says."

Seth Hawkins trusted me, and he agreed at once. April arrived in her nurse's uniform to assist, and I opened my bag. I'd never used scopolamin before, but I'd read enough about the dosages to be sure I could administer it properly.

As soon as the drug had taken effect I started questionin' him. "Seth, do you know anything about the fire at the mill?"

"No."

"Did you start the fire or have someone else start it for you?"

"No."

"Did you kill Henry Cordwainer?"

"No."

"Did you ever hit him with anything or push him down?"

"No. He was my friend."

Sheriff Lens edged me aside and took over the questioning. "Now, listen here, Seth. You didn't want the mill to reopen, did you?"

He hesitated, then answered, "I couldn't keep it goin' like my dad did. I was afraid it would be a failure."

"So you burned it down."

"No!"

"Do you know who burned it?"

"No."

I took over again. "Seth, do you know who stole Cordwainer's journals from the strongbox?"

"No."

"Do you know how it was done?"

"No."

Sheriff Lens held up his

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hand. "We're not gettin' anywhere, Doc. I told you I wasn't interested in the strongbox. And as for your truth serum—it don't prove a thing to me. Unless you want to inject everybody in the county till you find someone who admits to killin' him, the boy stays in jail."

I looked at April and saw her nod. The sheriff was right. I may have satisfied myself of Seth's innocence, but I hadn't satisfied the law. The fact that the sheriff had no real evidence against Seth didn't really matter. Cases like this one were tried by public opinion as much as by evidence.

"All right," I said. "Let him rest now. The effects of the drug will wear off soon."

As we walked back to my office April asked, "Did you really expect an old goof like Sheriff Lens to roll over an' sit up like a puppy jus' because you sprung some new drug on him?"

"I suppose not. But it was worth a try. At least I'm sure Seth is innocent."

"You knew that all along."

"Yes," I agreed.

"Then who's guilty? Do you think Cordwainer fell an' killed himself accidental, startin' the fire at the same time?"

I shook my head. "His skull was crushed by repeated blows. It wasn't from a fall. Besides, if the death and fire were somehow accidental, who stole his journals from the strongbox?"

"You always get back to the strongbox!"

I slumped in my office chair, feet on the desk. "I'm convinced that's the key to it, April. The strongbox with its bits of sawdust."

"You said the claim check wasn't found. Maybe the killer used it to get the real strongbox and replace it with a substitute."

"No, I'm sure the claim check simply burned in the fire. If the strongbox had been picked up and a substitute returned, it would have had a different claim number. Besides, I remember some worn spots on the lid. It was the same strongbox, all right. When I put it in my car—" I stopped short.

"What is it?" April asked.

"My car."

"What about it?"

I held up a hand. "Just let me think this through."

"Land sakes, Dr. Sam—"

My feet hit the floor and I headed for the street. "I have to check something at the newspaper office, April."

"What sorta somethin'?"

"An address."

An hour later I was back in the Sheriff's office. He looked at me through bleak, tired eyes and said, "What sorta tricks

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you up to now, Doc? More truth-serum monkeyshines?"

"No tricks. If you'll come with me, there's a chance I can break this case for you and hand you the real killer."

"Come where?"

"To Abernathy."

"Abernathy! That's over in the next county!"

"I know. I looked it up on the map, after I found the address I wanted. It's a long shot, but it's worth a try. You coming?"

"What for?"

"To make an arrest, if we're lucky."

"I can't arrest nobody in Abernathy!"

"Then we'll pick up some local deputies on our way. You must know the sheriff there."

"Well, sure, I know him. But—"

"Come on, then. There's no time to lose."

I took Sheriff Lens in my Runabout and we picked up a carload of local deputies on the outskirts of the town of Abernathy. It was larger than Northmont, with neat rows of houses lining shady streets. I found the street I wanted without difficulty.

"That white house there," I said, pointing it out from down the block.

"Looks like no one's to home," Sheriff Lens observed.

"It was a long shot at best, but let's make sure."

Then, suddenly, I saw the front door open. A clean-shaven man in a dark suit came down the front steps and glanced in our direction. I hated what I had to do, but there was no turnin' back. I crossed the street to intercept him.

"I believe we know each other," I said.

His eyes hesitated just a moment as he weighed his chances. "You're mistaken," he mumbled.

"I'm sorry, Delos," I said. "But we know it all."

His left hand moved fast, pulling me off balance, while his right hand snaked inside his jacket to emerge holdin' a snub-nosed revolver. I'd done it all wrong, I realized with a pang of fear. Now he would get away and I'd end up dead for my troubles. He was no friend. He was a cornered killer.

But then there was the crack of another weapon behind me, and Delos spun around, clutchin' his side. Sheriff Lens came runnin' up, kicking at the fallen gun, snapping the handcuffs on the wounded man. I'd never seen the sheriff move so fast.

"Get an ambulance," he shouted to the local deputy. "He's bleedin' bad." Then to me, "You satisfied?"

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"I guess so."

"This is Delos, the escaped convict?"

I nodded. "But we knew him better as Henry Cordwainer."

"Cordwainer! He's dead!"

"I know. Delos killed him six months ago, and then took his place at the gristmill."

I had to go over it on the drive back to Northmont, and even after I told it Sheriff Lens still had his doubts. He only knew he'd shot and captured an escaped convict. It took a while for the rest of it to sink in.

"You see, Sheriff, the missing journals were the key to it after all. I saw Cordwainer putting them into that strongbox—I even helped him. I carried the box and watched while it was weighed an' shipped. Yet when it reached Boston it was empty. Impossible? It seemed so at first, until I remembered feelin' some dampness in my car's side luggage well, where I'd had the strongbox during the drive to the depot. Dampness plus a small hole in the bottom of the box plus traces of sawdust inside—what did that add up to?"

"You got me," Sheriff Lens admitted.

"Melting ice, Sheriff."

"*Ice*?"

"Ice. I remembered seein' Cordwainer close the strongbox lid before I was called upstairs in the mill to look at an old skull. When I came back down he was closin' the lid again. He figured Seth would find that skull and call out to Minnie an' me. If Seth hadn't, Cordwainer would have gotten us out of the room on some other pretext. While we were out he quickly took the journals and books out of the strongbox and substituted a block of ice weighing about thirty-five pounds. The strongbox was locked, and I helped carry the ice to my car."

"I'll be damned!"

"Of course the tiny hole was to allow the water to escape, as it started to do in my car. The rest of it probably made a small stream in the railroad baggage car, but by the time the box reached Boston the water either evaporated or ran out the baggage-car door. In any event, the baggage handlers didn't pay any attention to it. And we found an empty strongbox waitin' for us."

"What about the sawdust?"

"That's the clue that clinched it for me. We know Cordwainer helped cut ice in the creek last winter for storage in the icehouse next to the mill. And ice stored like that is always packed in sawdust to preserve it. Cordwainer got a block of ice from the icehouse to substitute for the weight of his journals

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and books. The ice melted without a trace, but left some of the sawdust behind."

"All right, all right," Sheriff Lens agreed. "But why would Cordwainer steal his own journals? It don't make sense!"

"That's how I knew Cordwainer wasn't Cordwainer," I said. "The real Cordwainer would have no reason in the world to arrange such an elaborate disappearance, not when he'd be pickin' up the strongbox himself in Boston in a few days. The disappearance only made sense if he expected *someone else* to call for the strongbox and *if he knew he'd already be dead by then.* Since suicide was out of the question with a head wound like that, I had to consider the likelihood that the man we knew as Cordwainer was the killer."

"But why did the journals have to disappear? You skipped over that part."

"They had to disappear because part of them didn't exist! Thinkin' back over it, I remembered that Cordwainer would only allow me to read his journals of the first few months. What I saw of the later notes were only collections o' clippings from old newspapers and the like. In truth, there was no evidence that Cordwainer wrote a single thing after the first of this year.

"And what else did I know? The bearded naturalist had kept to himself before that, then suddenly, a few months later, had become friendly, even helping with the ice on the river. Seth Hawkins didn't like him when Cordwainer first rented the mill, but when he saw him again in January they became friends. Cordwainer's whole personality seemed to change after the first of the year. His personality changed, and his writin' stopped. Why? Because Henry Cordwainer became a different person."

I paused to let it sink in, then hurried on. "Then I remembered the prisoner Delos, who'd killed a guard while escapin' from the state prison on New Year's Day. It was a long shot, but it held together. Delos came to the mill the night of his escape, learned what the naturalist was up to, killed him, an' took his place. Luckily for Delos, they were about the same size, and he merely had to grow a beard to complete the disguise. Men with full beards tend to look alike.

"As you know, an escaped convict's greatest danger is always in the first six months or so, when police are watchin' his home and family. When I decided it was Delos, I looked up his address and took you there. He'd gone back home for a brief

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visit or stopover, as I hoped he would."

"Why didn't he just stay on at the mill?"

"Because the real Cordwainer had been on a sabbatical. If he didn't return to teaching in September, his friends would come looking for him and discover the truth."

We were nearing Northmont now, but Sheriff Lens still had questions. "All right. But what about the body in the fire? Even our poor excuse for a coroner could tell when a man's been dead over six months! Where was the body all that time, and how come it looked as if it had just been killed?"

"You should know the answer to that. Delos hid Cordwainer's body in the icehouse next door. The body was frozen, along with all that ice from the creek. I suppose that's why Delos had to pull out in July instead of waitin' till September. He kept track of the ice and must have seen they were getting close to uncovering the frozen body as they used up the blocks."

"Then the fire—"

I nodded. "To burn those empty journal books, of course. But the main reason for burnin' the mill was a truly unique one. Delos had to thaw out the body of the man he'd killed six months ago."

"Q"

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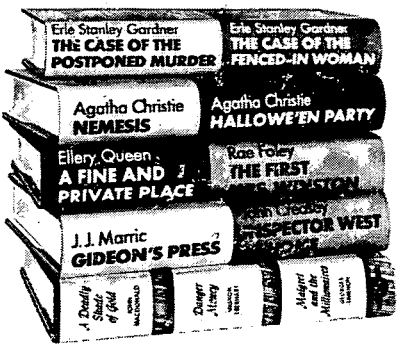

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